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OUR MR. DORMER

By

R. H. MOTTRAM

LONDON

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1927


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CONTENTS

Part I :	<i>"Fortune favours the 'Brave'"</i>	page I
II :	<i>The Age of Gentility</i>	85
III :	<i>"Peace bath her Victories"</i>	155
IV :	<i>Jubilee</i>	211
V :	<i>"Duration"</i>	275

PART I

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

PART I

Fortune favours the Brave

MR. DORMER stood at the door of Doughtys' Bank, taking some coins out of his purse. The expression on his face—little expression on a face not accustomed to show much—was something between apprehension and annoyance. Nor could he have told easily whether this was caused by the difficulty he experienced in getting his purse out of the fob of his stiff, tight breeches—made of a material closely woven and life-outlasting in durability—and in forcing back the bright steel ring over the knitted silk, to get at the guineas he required, or by the thought of what those guineas were going to buy—a seat in the “Fly” coach that would start from the George Inn at an early hour on the morrow.

And Mr. Dormer's head and face, tough and inexpressive as they appeared, had yet a curious quality, an air as though they had grown the short neck muffled in its stock, the rounded shoulders in the dark tail coat, the long paunch in its drab waistcoat, the short legs in their durable breeches and thick, light-coloured stockings ending in solid low shoes with metal buckles. Yes, there was something in the small

OUR MR. DORMER

grey eye and the pursed, clean-shaven lips above the large expanse of cheek and neckcloth, that said, "We govern this body. It does not govern us !"

Queerer still might have been Mr. Dormer's expression had he been capable of any such reflections on himself. Reflection, with its inevitable conscious examination, weighing up and placing of oneself, was not in fashion that year, which was 1813. Nor would it have percolated the then solidly stratified bulk of English society down to Mr. Dormer's level. He, a man of action, did the next thing necessitated by the none-too-easy struggle of budding commerce in an English county town.

Queer, indeed, to think that the treacherous April wind that blew round Mr. Dormer's legs and the doubtful April sun that shone fitfully on him still blow and shine on the spot where he stood ; and queer would have been Mr. Dormer's feelings if some one had been there to tell him, "This senseless nomad wind, this watery, uncertain sun, will still be here when you, Stephen Dormer, cashier to John and Joseph Doughty, will be no more !"

Queer might his feelings have been for the moment—but not longer. For besides being cashier to John and Joseph Doughty, Mr. Dormer, like all good servants, walked in as straight a path behind his employers as his respect for them allowed. Although the year

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

was 1813, there was still in the composition of Mr. Dormer and his like much remaining of the social code of that admirable page of the Good King Wenceslaus, who, it may be remembered, trod in his master's footsteps, first because it was the thing to do, and, secondly, because he found warmth in the footprints. Mr. Dormer not only modelled his handwriting on that of his employers, but his clothes discreetly imitated something of the subdued colour, simple cut, and solid value of theirs. But most of all he followed them on Sunday mornings, Bible under one arm, wife's hand under the other, down the evil-smelling, narrow streets, where the refuse of ages decayed between the cobbles, and the last loiterers of the debauch of the previous evening (Saturday was market day) were gathering their filth and rags, disease and shame, into whatever hiding-place they knew of, to Dog Lane, where the Friends' Meeting House reared its severe but handsome double door.

Not that Mr. Dormer would rise and lead the meeting as John or Joseph Doughty often did, but he would sit there, on one of the less conspicuous seats, perfectly still and silent, leaning rather forward, his plump wrists resting on his thighs, looking straight before him with a face that might have been carved out of wood. This attitude of body and mind was derived from two habits, ingrained by generations of use, and

OUR MR. DORMER

handed down to Mr. Dormer in the form of instincts. The more bodily one was simply the attitude of the yokel in repose. Mr. Dormer's forbears, small village personages, had always sat like that; and now that the enclosure of commons, the laying down of grazing, and the first gleams of an industrial system were driving all that little world towards the towns, Stephen Dormer perpetuated their way of sitting.

The mental attitude expressed by his unwinking stare was simply that respect for one's betters, so prevalent in an England where most of the thinking and all the initiative emanated from a numerically tiny section of the population. Just as Mr. Dormer had exchanged the immemorial trades of his ancestors for that of clerking in an office, so had he exchanged the boisterous, assertive liberty of the England of Chaucer and Bunyan for the quiet submissiveness of Doughtys' cashier.

And it was just that quiet submissiveness that was fraught with such consequences for the century that Mr. Dormer and his contemporaries had just commenced. It was just the quality which permitted an England, alone in all the world, flung off by the one other part of the habitable globe that spoke her tongue, isolated as the only unconquered corner of Europe, to go on steadily producing ships and men to fight overseas, even on the other side of the earth.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

And it was just the quality which rendered Mr. Dormer impervious to the suggestion that the mere wind and sun in which he stood were more permanent than he ; for in that very quiet submissiveness lay a persistent certainty, an unknown depth of belief in his place in the world.

Mr. Dormer, standing at the door of Doughtys' Bank—the wide, old, double-panelled door under its semicircular light, with its portico and twin pillars supported on three semicircular stone steps—took from his purse guineas, which he gave into the hands of a human figure that had surged up from the gutter, where a streak of filthy ooze showed among the cobbles.

It was one of that poorest of poor creatures, an odd-job messenger, who in 1813 was still a new phenomenon, as he hung about the doors of the business houses of those English towns that were just creating the industrial era. Nearly a generation was to pass before Dickens should breathe into all that half-bestial world of want and helplessness, such breath of life that they have become of necessity a landmark, a memorial, one of the few things likely to be remembered of the century Dickens adorns. This they owe to Dickens, not to the vocation of outside portering, which was the last refuge of the destitute rather than a school for heroes.

The outside messenger of Doughtys' Bank,

OUR MR. DORMER

to whom Mr. Dormer was confiding a message on that April morning in 1813, was a poor wretch known as "Tosh"—no one knew why and no one cared—who lived where and how no one knew or cared either ; ragged, lame from an accident which no one remembered, least of all Tosh himself, quite unprovided with wife or family, Christian name, or Christian teaching ; destitute, in fact, of every small comfort and dignity with which the great humanity of Dickens was to grace his kind, bare even to the depth of having no nocturnal illicit trade, as had Dickens' Mr. Jerry Cruncher.

When John or Joseph Doughty, or their clerks, came down the steps of the Bank, Tosh surged out of the corner that dogs used and where refuse collected, mumbling something unintelligible in a voice so hoarse as to be nearer an animal's whine than human speech, and reached out a hand for whatever was given him : and neither of the brothers Doughty, nor their staff, ever reflected on the cardinal fact of the existence of Tosh, namely, that as a messenger he was cheap. If he meant anything to Mr. Dormer, it was that he completed that scheme of the High, the Middle, and the Low, of which Mr. Doughty and Mr. Dormer occupied first and second place.

Tosh hobbled away, clutching the money to him, and saying over and over to himself : " One inside an' they will bring the box " ; and Mr.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Dormer, as he turned back into the Bank, never saw in that hunched, retreating figure a portent, a pointing finger, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, because, like most of mankind, he was incapable of looking a hundred years ahead, and was almost entirely under the spell of the immediate, the literal, and the obvious.

The errand on which he had despatched Tosh was to the George Inn on Hay Hill, along the market, where the "Fly" coach started on its fifteen hours' journey to the "Lamb," in Lombard Street, in which conveyance he had booked a seat. The remainder of the message informed the proprietors of the coach, who were used to it, that the cushion would have to be lifted out in order to admit the queer, coffin-like, iron-bound box in which Doughtys' Bank was in the habit of transferring specie; and nothing remained but for Mr. Dormer to take up his quill pen and inscribe neatly on the counter scroll before him, "Dormer to London £—— for his expenses."

There was still a cloud on Mr. Dormer's brow as, planting his low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat on his head, he passed out of the door again on his way to dinner. In those days, when no one dreamed of half-holidays or Bank holidays, and when places of business opened—even the most exclusive and indispensable—about nine, and none closed until

OUR MR. DORMER

six, cashiers like Mr. Dormer took a good two hours to their dinner ; and although he lived not five hundred yards away, he did not presume to go through the house where John Doughty resided, the ground floor of which was largely occupied by the offices of the Bank. Instead, he followed the solid mass of the red-brick wall of the old Georgian house, turned the corner of it, out of Bishopgate which it fronted, down a narrow and evil-smelling lane known as " the Middens " which ran under the side of the Bank House, along the wall that enclosed its kitchen and garden, and led out finally on to an undulating expanse of green known as Castle Ditches.

Mr. Dormer lived in what had been intended for a gardener's or coachman's house, at the extremity of the garden of the Bank House, and now walled off from it with high brick walls, against which Mr. Dormer had planted fruit trees.

The little square box of a house seemed sunk under its massive roof that overhung it in eaves nearly a yard wide, supported by a wooden pillar at each corner, until its small-paned, white-painted sash windows appeared flattened and foreshortened by the pressure. It contained two rooms, one above the other, from each of which a window looked out over the low railings into Castle Ditches. Its door was at the end of the Middens, its tiny kitchen,

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

with stove and copper, and its break-neck stairs, were squeezed in against the wall of the garden of the Bank House. Round its base ran a bricked pathway. Its twin chimneys smoked against a brass weathercock.

And whoso saw Mrs. Dormer bring in the midday meal would realise another characteristic of Mr. Dormer's home—its extreme comfort, then so common, now so unheard-of. There was beef, brown-ruddy beef, in plenty ; there were dumplings and gravy, potatoes and greens ; cheese, a high golden loaf, and fresh butter. The beer was in a pot-bellied brown jug, heavy enough to have split the table had it been set down with any force. Surely there lives no one but would take Mr. Dormer for a happy man, as he sat there, a slight reminiscence in his attitude still of a labourer eating bread and cheese, seated on a tree-stump, but amply at ease in his elbow-chair, masticating slowly and solemnly, looking at nothing.

Not that there was nothing worth looking at ! Mr. Dormer's living-room was plain and good, from its locked mother-of-pearl-inlaid tea-caddy to its eight-day clock ; from its curtains, old-rose-coloured, stiff as leather, to its deep-set, wide-hobbed, V-shaped iron fire-place.

Outside, the visible corner of the old town of Easthampton on that windy-shiny April day was beautiful as it never will be again. Beyond

OUR MR. DORMER

the rolling mounds of the Castle Ditches were visible the backs of the houses of Riverside Walk, that skirted the river, breweries and warehouses with great solid red-brick-and-tile merchants' dwellings in between them, all standing in gardens green and airy. And there was no smoke, no hurry, no noise ; and the poor and needy were not only out of sight, but out of mind ; in fact, they had hardly ever been in, except officially.

It was not of the comfort of the room nor of the beauty of the landscape that Mr. Dormer was thinking. Still less was he thinking of Mrs. Dormer, who sat opposite to him, plying, as he did, a pointed knife and two-pronged bone-handled fork, in her quiet way—a quieter way even than Mr. Dormer's. If he took things as a matter of course, how did she take them ? For Mr. Dormer was in a sense a risen man. Born in 1763 of poor but honest parents, at the age of twelve he had been taken into Doughtys' Bank by John Doughty, in 1775, when that institution had been founded, and had grown up with it. Not so his wife, whom he married in 1805 when he was forty-two and she over thirty. She had been an Alden of Thurlow, daughter of the rich Quaker weaver, and own sister to Mrs. Joseph Doughty, of the Bank. It did not strike the Quaker women that there was anything remarkable in one sister marrying the employer and the other the clerk ;

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

or, if it did, they concealed it. Mrs. Dormer was well adapted by appearance to do so. Small and spare, still wearing in 1813 the grey gown, crossed kerchief, and close cap concealing hair that was still brown, she was not the woman to give or receive vivid impressions. Her portrait preserves the passive power of the Quaker education enhanced in Quaker women by their sex. But once realised, the force of quiet persistence behind that straight, rather thin-lipped mouth and the large fine brown eyes with something in them of the dumb animal, was not easily forgotten.

And it was evident that she was about to become a mother.

What mystery lay behind the perfect silence, the rich comfort of Mr. and Mrs. Dormer's midday meal? How had two people, part of a great conspiracy to quell, outdo, and dispense with animal instinct, ever managed to reach this stage of domestic comfort? How had Mr. Dormer, at forty-two years of age, declared his budding passion for the placid, mature Quakeress, and how had she responded? Under the complete lack of all expression by word or look, how had any communication, even on the most domestic events, the most instinctive relationships, ever been made? Probably the only answer is that Mr. and Mrs. Dormer, like all successful couples, preached one thing and practised another. Outwardly they were pre-

OUR MR. DORMER

occupied with shunning the devil and his snares. Inwardly they were what their village-tradesmen descent made them : people whose primitive, instinctive life flowed on undisturbed beneath the artificial biblical manners they chose to adopt.

Happy in his occupation, comfortable in his home, with the prospect of a child to grow like him, what could be added to such a man as Mr. Stephen Dormer ? Nothing, therefore, in his immediate surroundings could account for the shadow on Mr. Dormer's brow ; and there remains no explanation of it except the near prospect of his journey to London. Such a journey was nothing to look forward to with pleasurable anticipation. There was certainly discomfort, possibly danger ; inevitably the interruption in a life that was quiet, orderly, methodical, comfortable beyond imagining.

However, it took more than the mere future to upset Mr. Dormer's habits. Pushing aside his plate and emptying his glass at a draught, he turned his chair to the left, so that his feet rested on a patchwork-covered footstool exactly before the fire. Brushing a few crumbs from the stiff folds of his waistcoat, he took from his fob a watch in a brass case, nearly three-quarters of an inch from back to front, noted the hour—twenty to three—placed it on the table and composed himself, with a folding of hands and a gulp of the throat, for his nap.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

The fire rustled, the clock ticked, and the April wind whistled. The fitful sunshine shone and faded on Mr. Dormer's head. His wife, never raising her eyes from the great wooden tray of plates and dishes and remains that she had cleared from the table, moved noiselessly from the room, closing the door without a sound. Only the cat, stealing from beneath the table, cocked one vivid eye at Mr. Dormer and composed herself, as he had, beside his feet.

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In all England the old heath that led up from the great marshes of Bedford and Huntingdon to the low, gravelly plateau on which Easthampton stands, remained with a few forests and mountains, a few sections of remote coastline, much as it always had been. The road that bisected it made a thin line of civilisation amid wild bird and wild flower. And there was something, too, about the place more seizing than mere wildness. Scattered over it were the traces of man's first struggles to be more than a brute : here a ditch and there a mound ; here a flint arrow-head and there a potsherd ; but most of all, running dead across the high road, an old green bridle-track, trodden out by primitive man before he thought of shoes.

No such thoughts were in Mr. Dormer's mind as he jogged and jolted and swayed in

OUR MR. DORMER

the coach that mounted the long hill on its return journey, on the second night since it had left Easthampton. Twenty years had still to roll before those fast coaches of Dickens' epoch that gave rise to that picturesque fiction, the "good old coaching days."

The coach in which Mr. Dormer travelled had already been on the road fourteen hours, at an average pace of six miles an hour ; a trace had broken, meaning delay ; then severe storms of April sleet overtook it at dusk, through which the travellers had to walk beside the labouring vehicle. And now that it was actually jogging along again, the wind howled and the rain beat upon it to such a tune, that Mr. Dormer could not sleep, but, balancing himself as well as he could in his corner, stared moodily at the black darkness of the night outside, at the swaying shapes of the coach "inside," all made obscurely visible by the feeble yellow back-glow of the lamps.

Mr. Dormer, it may have been gathered, was not an imaginative or curious man, at any time. As he sat there, staring, it is highly improbable that he reflected on the ancient heath across which he was being trundled, its history and associations, still less upon its stories and superstitions, well known to him though they were. And as he shook and vibrated nearer and nearer to the old bridle-track, he was the last person to reflect on the

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

local legend, that at night-time beings not of this world rode up and down over the short green turf, molesting, even carrying off bodily, humans unfortunate enough to have offended them, deliberately or not—though all such matters were familiar to him from the cradle, through the mouth of his mother, a country-woman in a sense of the word not nowadays understandable. It is unlikely that he was even reflecting on how cold and wet and hungry he was. The only thought of sufficient importance to keep afloat on the tide of drowsy, sleepless fatigue that engulfed him, was of the wooden box securely wedged into the seat he occupied, and of the letter securely buttoned into the breast of his high-collared, long-skirted overcoat, stiff as a board, and marked in its deep nap like the bark of a tree. The letter was written from the Quaker Banker of Lombard Street to the Quaker Banker of East-hampton in the following terms :

“LOMBARD STREET, LONDON,

“Fourth month, 1813.

“Respected Cousins JOHN and JOSEPH DOUGHTY,

“Wedebit thee—(never mind how many thousands)—in gold, which thy servant Stephen Dormer will deliver thee in thy box by the ‘Fly’ coach. We think this a most hazardous despatch, by the times we live in, but in view of thy great need have nevertheless sent as asked by thy letter.

“Thy Cousins THOMAS and ELIJAH HOPPER.”

OUR MR. DORMER

Mr. Dormer knew it by heart, ran through it in his mind, squeezed his elbow against his inside breast pocket to feel it, and his knee against the lid of the box beneath the cushion. It must have been the movement of his foot that suddenly brought him wide awake with an exclamation. He had sat the whole night with his feet rather closer under him than was really comfortable to a man of his build, to avoid a large and sprawling pair of boots belonging to the gentleman on the opposite seat. Now his feet were free to move. The opposite seat was empty. There was nothing remarkable in that. The market town where the whole coach-load had supped might have been his destination. Yet no—he had said he was going to Easthampton ; had professed relationship with Armes of the George Inn ; had saluted Mr. Dormer by name, and added : “ from the Bank, I believe.” It all came back to Mr. Dormer in the darkness and solitude of the coach. The traveller opposite had been so solicitous for his welfare, so put out that he, as was his habit on these occasions (Mr. Dormer had done this journey a dozen times in his life), had sat solidly eating and drinking what was brought to him in the coach, standing in the inn yard amongst the reek of steam and dung while horses were changed, instead of leaving his seat (and the box beneath it) to seek the comparative ease of the inn. And his com-

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

panion, the muffled gentleman in the far corner, dressed so shabbily that it had caused Mr. Dormer to wonder how he came to be travelling "inside"?—Mr. Dormer peered hard into the far corner. He was gone too. Surely he had walked up the first hill after supper before they all mounted into their seats! Now he came to think of it, those two—the talkative, friendly gentleman and the shabby, buttoned-up one—had got down together at every stage, though they never spoke to one another. Mr. Dormer glanced to his left. The fourth fellow-traveller was in his accustomed place, chin sunk on breast, asleep apparently.

It must have been about this time that the coach topped the last rise, just where the old green bridle-track of prehistoric man follows the edge of the plateau. Mr. Dormer was conscious of a violent gust of wind, a rattle of rain, and then a sudden jerk, the coach standing stock-still. The effect of the sudden stoppage was to throw Mr. Dormer and the remaining passenger beside him forward with such impetus that the latter woke, calling in an authoritative voice, "What is it?" Mr. Dormer, petrified, fastened to the edge of the seat against which he had saved himself, found it impossible to utter a sound. Outside there was shouting and stamping of hoofs.

Mr. Dormer's fellow-traveller lunged across him, wrenched open the window, and shoved

OUR MR. DORMER

out half his body. Mr. Dormer heard him shout in a sharp, authoritative voice, "Stand back, you ! or I fire ! Drive on, coach !" had an impression of a dark mass falling away from the coach in a swirl of rain, and was flung from his seat as the coach re-started with a jerk.

His companion slipped back from the window, but did not close it. He said with a chuckle : "Had him there ! Horses' hind legs in the ditch !"

Mr. Dormer's throat and lips would only allow him to say, "What is it ?"

"Some one trying to stop the coach."

Mr. Dormer's tongue loosened itself.

"This is robbery—violence—the guard has his duty——"

"Bribed, as like as not. In any case, how would you like to challenge a man who comes up behind you ?"

Mr. Dormer was, for the year 1813, a very modern man. His mind, at the age of fifty, had become set in a groove, now almost universal, then not too common. That is to say, he had never experienced murderous violence, and had come by every-day habit, as much as by Sunday profession, to disbelieve that such a thing existed. He heard of it, read of it, cursorily, and half pitied, half blamed those who did come in contact with it. His instinct expressed itself :

"But the driver ! the outsides !" (He

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

meant the travellers occupying the cheap seats on the roof.)

His companion cut him short.

"Haven't got an ounce of powder or a grain of pluck between them ! Besides, what have they to lose ? It's you and me—and your box." And then, suddenly : "Hullo !"

Mr. Dormer did not inquire the reason of the exclamation. The sound of horses—two horses—gaining at a sharp canter on the coach was audible enough.

Mr. Dormer was a man of peaceful habit, but he was also English to the core ; English in a sense that meant being the inhabitant of a small nation with few dubious new friends and enemies everywhere else. And once the spell of daily habit was broken, there came up readily enough to the surface another instinct : "No, not this !—not without a struggle !"

He found himself wedged against the open left window of the coach, staring back through the rainy darkness over the trundling hind wheel that flung mud in his face, grasping something cold and hard that had been thrust into his hand, while his companion's words sunk into his brain : "At the horse, squeeze on the butt . . . steady !"

Sure enough, there surged up beside the coach something darker and nearer than the flying hedges that gleamed and fled in the feeble lamplight, while abreast of him sounded the

OUR MR. DORMER

“tree-op, tree-op” of hoof-falls. His arm stiffened and his fingers contracted ; there was a glare and an explosion, a sharp jerk on his wrist, a jolting jerk that took his legs from under him, and landed him breathless on the front seat. The coach had stopped, there were people and lights around it. With shaking knees he climbed to the ground and pressed within the circle of lamplight. His companion—a tall, smart figure in spite of one arm folded over the breast of a long military coat—was clapping him on the shoulders, crying, “Well done ! daylight clean through him !”

Mr. Dormer was looking at the lip of the ditch, where a scraggy horse, bearing only a rope halter, was hanging its foam-flecked nose towards a human form that lay, crumpled anyhow, on the ground. Men were lifting it, exposing the straw-swathed legs, ragged-skirted coat and stockless neck. The lank damp hair hung over the eyes, the skin was clay-colour, the breast-buttons gleamed stickily.

“And look here,” cried Mr. Dormer’s travelling companion. He raised the limp arm and showed clasped in the stiffening hand an old brass candlestick with a polished socket. “That ’s what you halted for, driver !”

The body was strapped on behind, the horse tied, and the coach resumed its way. Inside, Mr. Dormer’s companion was tilting to his own lips, then offering with a great flow of

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

compliment and oath, a solid heavy flask, with a running commentary, "Well done ! bravely done ! The other made off. I wager the horse was stole—crowner's inquest !" But Mr. Dormer, behind the bow and smile that politeness demanded, was dreaming the queerest dream of his fifty years : he had no remorse for having done his plain duty, and he had the primitive delight of the animal prevailing over an adversary. He did not analyse his feeling, was hardly conscious of it, perhaps ; would have been astonished indeed had he been told that he was glorying in having killed a man.

As his companion's flask emptied, his expressions of regard increased. It was nearly midnight before Mr. Dormer had an instinctive sense of being near home, felt rather than saw the shadow of South Bar engulf the coach, and heard the wheels rattle on the cobbles. Shaking out his benumbed limbs and leaving his new friend protesting that he would have the pleasure of calling on him, Mr. Dormer felt his way up George Yard, and emerged by the Tap into the Middens, under the shadow of the Bank House. Behind him Tosh the messenger and a man from the George staggered with the box. They went to the side door in the Middens and were astonished to find it unlocked, candles alight and the household astir. Ushered through the heavy door that led from the house into the " Parlour " of the Bank, Dormer saw Joseph

OUR MR. DORMER

Doughty seated at his accustomed desk in a gown and slippers.

Joseph Doughty, then only in his forties, had already become one of those men whose appearance gives little or no clue to their age. He was above middle height, but stooped shapelessly, from desk-work and want of exercise. His dust-coloured hair was getting thin. His complexion was pallid and blotchy, the result of generations of inbred town-dwellers' blood and wasting religious emotion. It was not until he rose from his desk that his personality made its impression. For the power Joseph Doughty wielded and the still greater power he was unconsciously founding, did not depend on any physical quality, on any immediate effect. At a time politically corrupt, socially beastly and ignorant, when England, mean in her interior economy, petty in importance in the world, was only just putting out her hand to grasp the opportunity of the century that was to be hers, Joseph Doughty was the man the hour demanded, and on him and his like was founded a great commercial empire. It was not that there was anything new about his Quaker ways—the Meeting House in Dog Lane was a hundred years old, and his ancestors had built it ; it was not that he had invented his banking career—his great-grandfather had drawn drafts and taken money at interest ; but it was the development of these two at that

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

precise moment that rendered him in a few years the real power behind the political figure-heads of the new century. When his father had first, in 1775, made the public announcement of opening "a banking office, where will be found every accommodation consistent with such an undertaking," one of the first lines of business had been to take appointment from the Treasury as exchangers of the debased, multifarious coinage then current. This brought them from being little-known specialists in a business neither wanted nor understood by the mass of the population, to the status of a public institution. Men might laugh at the Quaker's clothes and speech, but they respected his integrity and serviceableness. At peace when others went to war, sober when many were habitually fuddled, armed with the solid resource of money when most were starving or bankrupt, honest amid corruption and hard-working while sport was the one engrossing occupation of the time, small wonder that the Quaker Banker emerged from the stress of the seventeen-nineties and the long drag of the eighteen-hundreds with twice the wealth and ten times the power he had previously enjoyed.

Such was the man, lopsided and pale, but with something burning in his eyes, and the authority of manner that no mere privilege could give, who rose from his desk, candle in one hand, keys in the other, to say :

OUR MR. DORMER

“ Friend Dormer, we began almost to fear for thee ! ”

What words Mr. Dormer would have found to describe the events of his return journey will never be known, for as he shepherded the bearers of the box into the ground-floor strong-room that Mr. Doughty had unlocked, the house door opened, and there stood framed in the doorway by the flickering candlelight a tallish woman in a dull-coloured outdoor cloak, the hood of which was drawn over her hair and ears, framing the well-proportioned face, with its large expressive eyes. Less well known than her distant relative Elizabeth Fry, Jane, *née* Alden, the wife of Joseph Doughty, possessed many of the same qualities. It may be true, as detractors have said, that the long simple lines of their daily attire hid any physical defect, but it is certain that the Quaker women, even more than the Quaker men, had a quiet assumption of authority about them—a benign dignity that quelled surly governors of prisons and half-bestial prisoners alike, when visiting.

Jane Doughty said : “ Stephen Dormer, thou hast a son ! ”

It was all a part of the woman to speak in that tone and those words of such an event, to a man who was at once her servant and her brother-in-law, who had just returned from journey. Nor did she miscalculate. She

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

turned, and Mr. Dormer followed her. The wind tussled with her cloak and his coat-tails as, leaning forward against the storm, they made their way along the Middens under the wall of the garden.

At Mr. Dormer's a great fire burned. Before it a round, capable, middle-aged woman—the best-known midwife of that quarter of the town—held a little bundle from which proceeded a wail. On the stairs was subdued movement of those who tended the mother above. Mr. Dormer was told to do this and that, and to go here and there by Jane Doughty, quietly, firmly. She ordered, he obeyed. To any one who could have watched him, Mr. Dormer probably revealed himself during those hours as much as his limitations permitted. He showed, perhaps, the perfect type of nineteenth-century clerk. He had all the submissiveness of the labourers from whom he was sprung, without any of their instincts or usefulness; and he was just as far removed from a later generation with its calculating precautions and its conscious bravery.

At dawn Jane Doughty came to tell him that in gaining a son he had lost a wife. Mr. Dormer blinked, but the closest observer could not have said if it were from fear, sorrow, or fatigue.

The old Stoic training of the country, joined by the new Stoic training of what was just

OUR MR. DORMER

becoming clerkdom, served him well. He went upstairs with Jane Doughty. She kneeled on one side of the bed and he on the other. Of what passed in her mind there can be little doubt. The dead woman was her sister. Moreover, she had a considerable store of quite genuine religious emotion ; the phraseology and ideas of the New Testament ran easily in her mind. Herself an autocratic, original woman of considerable breadth of view and decision in action, she was exceptionally well read, and led a very free, active life for those times, while believing herself to be practising the humble, laborious asceticism of an early Christian. She frequently spoke at the Meeting House at Dog Lane, and can have had little or no difficulty in expressing her feelings to herself. With Mr. Dormer it was different. No one knew what his feelings towards his wife really were. He never spoke at Dog Lane, and while attending regularly and following attentively, had no visible habit of expression with regard to such a thing as now befell him. Instinctive awe before death, proceeding from the premonition of what must sooner or later happen to himself, no doubt there was. What else, must for ever remain a mystery. All that is certain is that, having slept huddled in a chair in his sitting-room for an hour or two, he was seen by Doughtys' clerks to be at his place, at the end of the long counter, next to

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Joseph Doughty, at nine o'clock of the next morning.

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It is one of the most vital facts about Mr. Dormer, this unswerving regularity of his, this devotion, ostensibly to the firm of Doughty, but in reality of course to his own deep-seated, never-expressed vision of perfection. To him, one of the first of the really great clerks of the mercantile and financial houses that were founding the greatness of England, it was nothing that he had been, at the age of fifty, in complete dislocation of his usual sedentary, silent, regular life, on a long journey, had killed a fellow-creature, had been gratified in his deepest instincts by the birth of a son of his flesh, and bereaved at the same moment in the tender intimate centre of his domestic life. Doughtys' clerks could see nothing changed in the solid drab figure : a trifle more owl-eyed, perhaps the least bit more silent, a thought slower as he made with care and used with skill his quill pen, that moved with hardly a hiss over the beautiful paper of the Bank books. Doughtys' Bank was still there, so was Mr. Dormer.

Mr. Dormer had every reason for his attitude. To such as he, the firm of Doughty meant everything. Not merely daily bread, daily

OUR MR. DORMER

employment of his time at a never-failing, congenial occupation (perhaps the greatest boon fate can confer), but from the most impersonal point of view, Doughtys' meant Peace and Plenty (as it was then phrased) amid a Europe at war and an England that was all too frequently hard up for food, government and money. There was, however, little of the impersonal in Mr. Dormer's attitude. He was safe in the Doughtys' confidence—a warm place for a Mr. Dormer.

Doughtys' Bank looked all that Mr. Dormer held it to be. Situate just off the market (for it was not many years since Quakers had been publicly insulted in the streets), the earlier Doughty who built it had commenced it under Anne and finished it, in his leisurely, sure way, under the early Georges. It stood on what was becoming daily a more important street, that ran from the market-place, past the Bank, along the wall of the Cathedral close, over the river on an immemorial bridge, and away to the coast. So that Doughtys', fronting north (as a house may which is built for security, and then for business reasons, not for mere pleasure), had before it the poorer, older quarters of the town, that hugged what had been the monastery gate. Eastward was the river, just beginning to be lined with substantial merchants' houses, gardens, wharves and warehouses, where men lived among their businesses. South was the

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Castle on its mound, with its acres of green "Ditches"—earthworks, British perhaps, but so overlaid with Saxon, Norman and subsequent entrenchings as to be a maze of lush, tree-encumbered humps and hollows, where every Saturday that Saturnalia of cruelty and noise, the cattle market, was held. West again was the market-place proper, and the better residential quarter of the town.

The front of Doughtys' was all that the front of an Anne-Georgian mansion should be. Its building began just as business rather than safety was the first consideration, and though he faced it north, he who built had elbow room, both on the ground and in his pocket, to do it well. Its solid mass of mellowed brick, with stone corners and window-mouldings, reared three ample storeys beneath a roof built with no stint of ten-inch beams and the handsome red tile of the district. Right in the centre of the ground-floor front, the semicircular stone steps supporting the pillars and portico of the main entrance pushed far out into the cobbles of the thoroughfare. Above this, in the centre of the first floor, was one of those triple-light, arcaded windows, with broad white and wide sashes, that make the glory of the period. Above again, on the third storey, was a fan-shaped window twelve feet across. Each side of this central feature, from ground where the iron-barred cellar-lights squinted at the

OUR MR. DORMER

cobbles to the moulded cornice beneath the gutters, each floor had its two pairs of high, broad-sash windows, storey by storey, side matching side. East and west the great blank walls were only pierced by stairway windows ; the south ran down in kitchens and outhouses, beneath the high wall that separated them from the Middens Alley, to the garden. Topping all, stood the chimney-stacks, rank on rank. On the ground floor, what would have been normally two fine, high, square rooms, had long been converted into the "Banking office," or "shop," by doing away with what had been undoubtedly a very fine spacious entrance hall. Now, when you entered by the front door, you found facing you a counter at which habitually were to be seen Joseph Doughty and Mr. Dormer. Left and right were partitions behind which worked the nine clerks, who had been added, one by one, in Mr. Dormer's recollection. In the centre a narrow gangway, closed by a wicket, led to a door at the back, through which could be seen the fine carved staircase of dark oak, with its moulded rail, mounting from a very much circumscribed back hall, that divided the "parlour," as it was called, where the partners of the firm sat as often as not, from the kitchens and offices of the house.

And what a human thing business was then ! Conducted under the master's roof, within his own door, the "shop" was frequently invaded

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

by the glorious promise of roast or boiled, of Welsh rarebit or Madeira. Domestic noises could be heard—tinkle of pots and pans, flumping of beds overhead, and the street cries of those days—though the actual domestic business of the house was now carried on at the side door in Middens Alley. On the morning in question Joseph Doughty, putting on his low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, said, as he passed out at the wicket : “ I must see Dayborn about his draft ! ”

When Doughtys’ said they were going to “ see ” a man “ about a draft,” a sort of tremor passed through the trading circles of East-hampton, to such a height of legend had Doughtys’ risen even at that date. Doughtys’ were known to be generous but just, long-suffering but unforgetful. Among the cattle-dealers and maltsters, the yarn-spinners and shopkeepers, the lawyers and tradesmen of that day, this sort of conversation would ensue :

“ Doughtys’ have written me ! ”—or “ been to me ! ”

“ Ah !—did they begin ‘ Respected Friend ’ ? If so——”

“ No, they began ‘ Esteemed Friend.’ ”

“ Then there ’s no help for it. You ’ll have to pay.”

Joseph Doughty, in particular, translated the biblical command of forgiveness unto seventy times seven to the extent of allowing a man

OUR MR. DORMER

three chances to provide for a bill ; the third time it was not met, the law was put in motion. As Doughtys' business was extensive and his practice just but unvarying, and as the year 1813 was late in a period of European upheaval and financial depression, it followed that a network of mortgage and seizure, of forfeiture and surrender, was turning property after property, business after business, sum upon sum into Doughtys' hands.

Joseph Doughty went out to find Dayborn, and Mr. Dormer was left alone at the counter. He had not long been so before there appeared on the threshold a tall gentleman, whose high hat, slightly cocked, whose useless arm strapped across the front of a long, square, smartly cut, frogged top-coat, air, carriage and gait, all bespoke the ex-soldier.

The very entry of such a person caused Mr. Dormer qualms. It was not "business." To feel and to say that a thing was "not business," the shibboleth of commerce, originated in the hearts and mouths of Mr. Dormer and his sort. His close feeling of the preciousness of Doughtys' and the necessity of keeping the tone of the office unspoiled in its pure commercialism, was like the feeling of a musician for his instrument. What was his horror, therefore, as he looked owl-eyed and bristling slightly at the stranger, to see the latter stride, clanking almost as if he wore spurs, to the counter, and smite it with his

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

cane a crack like a musket-shot that made the windows rattle and the nine clerks jump, addressing him (Mr. Dormer) in these terms :

“ Señor, I come to give thanks, to offer my hand and my heart and my sword ! ”

Mr. Dormer's first thought was that the stranger had been drinking ; the next, “ What will the ‘ firm ’ think or say ? ” the next, a dawning realisation, dimmed by the domestic affliction that had since fallen upon him, that he had seen this person, heard this voice, felt the impact of this personality before. Observing the hand held out to him, with some disfavour he took it in his own, which was seized, wrung to the point of dislocation and flung away, as the stranger, nodding to such of the clerks as were peering round the screen, composed himself, as it were, his elbow resting upon the counter, his body supported by his elbow. There was no doubt about it, it was Mr. Dormer's companion of the coach.

As if this were not enough, the newcomer began to address a person who had come from the parlour, and now stood behind Mr. Dormer, in these terms :

“ I take it you are in command here, sir. I may give you joy of your people : this your man (indicating Mr. Dormer) is a dead shot ! ”

Had it been Joseph Doughty who had been thus addressed, he might very well have said something quietly stubborn and repelling in

OUR MR. DORMER

his Quaker way, that, while gentle and in-offensive, would pierce the thickest hide and warn the stranger off. But it was not Joseph. It was John Doughty, and that made a world of difference. John was much younger, had never become a "plain" Quaker like Joseph, showed in many ways the tincture of aristocratic blood they had from their mother, had never married an Alden, wore a coat that verged on being coloured, had a library, even pictures, in his house far in the country towards Seaton, the nearest port. He usually attended at Seaton Bank, his open mind being found more able to cope with the rough, risky, seafaring point of view, while Joseph's strict Quakerism suited the more staid and solid Easthampton. But more than all else, John had the great characteristic of the nineteenth century, of which he was so much more a citizen than his elder brother. He had its insatiable curiosity. There was nothing he did not want to know, to probe, to acquire. The salt, sea-going air of Seaton favoured this foible, his lukewarm Quakerism permitted it, his slightly younger vitality promoted it. And in 1813 there were such worlds before the inquiring mind.

John Doughty therefore held open the little wicket in the counter and asked Mr. Dormer's military acquaintance to step in. He did so, with a sort of half-salute, passing through to the "parlour," where from time to time his

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

voice and footsteps could be heard, and comparative quiet settled down again in the "shop." But not quite. Deep down, in Mr. Dormer's ears, there was a reverberation. Unused to realising acutely events outside the business, incapable of any particular expression, Mr. Dormer began from that morning to be dimly conscious that the crack of the first and last pistol-shot fired by him was to go on muttering, louder and louder, through his destiny. It seemed to have ruffled once and for all the quiet stream of his quiet existence, and to be a fitting prelude for such changes as becoming a father and a widower within an hour. The encroachment of his military friend that morning afterwards seemed to him but the first manifestation of the course of Fate. It found its stealthy way into his regular daily habit, and easily displaced the lip-service he had previously paid to the observances of the Dog Lane Meeting House. It was the beginning of a spiritualisation of Mr. Dormer, purging his flesh away.

Not that he got the whole matter in proportion at once. At the moment his military friend's incursion passed almost unheeded. The strongest impression on his mind was that of widowhood. He even started out for dinner some moments before his usual hour, and making his way between the bow-fronted, spun-glass-lighted shops, over which lived the shopkeepers, that lined Bishopgate, he reached the

OUR MR. DORMER

Market Place. Crossing over this, he entered a builder's yard, where they undertook funerals. Here he met with a good deal of sympathy and consideration, the builder being a widower himself and having all that respect for Mr. Dormer natural from a solid, but not impossibly secure, tradesman towards Doughtys' right-hand man. But most of all, he was met with the announcement that Mrs. Joseph Doughty had called and made all arrangements.

Mr. Dormer was neither surprised nor upset. It was natural for Jane Doughty to take the lead. He threaded his way down the side of the Market, between the crowd of loungers by the stocks, and the queue of housewives by the pump, crossed over Nether Bargate, and struck into one of those narrow alleys at the far end of an inn yard that, like the Middens, led him out on to the Castle Ditches. Skirting the backs of the houses by their gardens, he came in a few minutes to his own.

Jane Doughty was there in control. Whatever was necessary was being done, quietly, smoothly, competently. The table was set, and his dinner was brought. By the fire sat the midwife busy sewing, her foot rocking the cradle.

Mr. Dormer was above all a man of habit. It is even doubtful if the strongest feeling he had with regard to his married life were not a sense of comfort at such a permanent, satisfactory habit. Suddenly it had ceased. The

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

place opposite him was empty. He instinctively assumed the nearest habit—just as permanent and as satisfactory—widowhood. He ate his dinner without comment, laid the watch on the table, turned his chair, and took his nap.

The Quakers had no set form of funeral service. When the day came, they met, all the best known and most intimate of them, in the Meeting House at Dog Lane. The wind and the rain had gone. It was a fine, warm end-of-April day. The gardens of the city were all bud and blossom. Even Dog Lane—that narrow, ancient way that threaded the poorer, older quarters of the city—had an aura of flies above its immemorial filth. There, amid old stone-and-timber lattice-windowed houses—for the most part disreputable tenements just being bought up by the growing band of weavers and dyers or falling down of their own disrepair—the Friends' Meeting House stood, a Jacobean, barn-like building approached down a little yard planted with those rather ethereal lime trees that grace such places. Originally it had consisted of two rooms knocked together in a cottage, while the yard had been covered with buildings that hid it from the street. That was in the days when to be a Quaker meant to be pursued by the sticks and stones of the Easthampton mob, if not by arrest and maltreatment at the hands of the servants of the King, led, the one or the other,

OUR MR. DORMER

by the parson of the parish. But where Quaker piety and learning had been despised, Quaker industry and wealth had triumphed. The Meeting House had been built in a then populous thoroughfare, boldly facing the street from which it had hidden. Its great roof hung like a Quaker hood over the high wide windows. Its brick front was diversified by pilaster and portico. Handsome wrought-iron gates closed the yard from Dog Lane. And while the whole premises were without ornament, almost without feature in their plainness—for the portico, without carving or moulding, was dumb—they were impressive, partly from sheer simplicity among buildings that had the intimate human confusion of the surrounding earlier period of domestic architecture, partly from the solid quality of the materials, their excellent repair, and trim cleanliness. The interior was as plain as the outside, a mere semicircle of black oak seats, beneath walls of dead white interspersed with dark oak, the whole enclosing—focussing itself—on the plain table and chair, with a reading-desk that stood where the altar usually stands in Christian or other sacred buildings.

Before this on trestles lay the coffin—well made, handsome in the grain of its wood, guiltless of any metal-work. Immediately next it sat Stephen Dormer, Joseph Doughty, Jane Doughty. Behind them were some fifty or

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

sixty "Friends"—in the narrowest sense of the word, subscribers to the upkeep of the meeting and frequent or infrequent readers or speakers at it. Behind them again were "friends," with a smaller F, more or less regular attendants, relations or servants or protégés of Friends, but who were not looked to for guidance of the spirit, or maintenance of the material fabric. All around was the slightly mouldy air of a building shut and unused for the greater part of the week, and built and ventilated according to the ideas of the seventeenth century. Over the whole spread the soft radiance of the April afternoon and the silence of the Friends' religious habit.

After some time of perfect quiet, hardly broken by a cough, a rustle, or the dim noises of the street, Joseph Doughty rose and began to speak. The original Quaker emotion that had given the movement its name, had long passed. It was over a century since Pepys had seen a naked creature called a "Quaker" running and dancing his semi-epileptic dance. The stream, however, still ran strong, though now tranquil and decorous. Joseph Doughty, speaking half as if to himself, uttered simply the sentiments that the death of a near relative might cause any thoughtful man. Stopping once or twice, he finally left off and sat down. He was followed by Jane Doughty with hardly a pause. She had the advantage of him,

OUR MR. DORMER

whether because of a more ready feminine emotional gift of expression or the effect of her appearance. One forgot Joseph Doughty's ungainly body and look of mediocre health on account of his sincerity. One admired Jane Doughty's statuesque beauty, carriage and composure, set off rather than obstructed by her Quaker dress. She was followed by a woman Friend, and she in turn by a man Friend, each of them speaking more shortly than the Doughtys. The perfect silence was broken by whispered prayer and conversation.

Joseph Doughty rose, motioned to the bearers, and the coffin was borne out, down the shade and quiet of the yard, into the stuffy agitation of Dog Lane. Rough, unkempt women, talking in groups, screamed at naked children scrambling in the gutter. Outside the taverns loungers stared and commented, and a feeble-minded boy moped and mowed.

Up in the Bishopgate, opposite the Bank, was a hearse, in which the coffin was laid, and behind which such Friends as desired followed the Doughtys, whose plain Quakerism did not admit of their riding. Down Bishopgate, with Riverside to the right and the wallflower-crowned enclosure of the Close on the left, they came to the old hump-backed stone bridge that crossed the river.

Up the hill they wound, horses panting and straining, Friends bent-headed, silently mount-

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

ing. The old burial-ground looked at its best. It was already carefully planted and regularly tended. Since the majority of the Friends had never been "plain" enough to go without tombstones (as the few purists did), and as such memorials had to be paid for, and were therefore beyond those who had no modest competence, the monuments raised to the departed were worthy if severe.

The April air moved sweetly through the bud-laden, bare limbs of oak and ash. The earlier growths were showing leaf. Around was the well-kept ground, only half used. Below the gravelly point on which it stood, circled by the winding course of the river, lay Easthampton, nearly half its extent green with garden ground, thrusting to the mild sky its five-and-thirty church towers, conspicuous among the lower buildings of that day. The afternoon was clear. The burial-ground had the grace of weeping ash and sculptured urn so often seen in the woodcuts of the period. Easthampton had still the concise, spacious lines of a mediæval city within its walls. There was nothing petty in the first, nothing monstrous in the second. And Mr. Dormer, that man of undeveloped, unexpressed emotions, felt, as the earth rattled on the coffin and the Friends began moving towards the gate, as if a great weight had been lifted from his chest. He had been comfortably married. That had been

OUR MR. DORMER

destroyed by what was then called the Hand of God. For days he had been thoroughly uncomfortable with the body lying in the house ; now he was a proper, effective widower. He acquiesced and felt relieved. He had put off one habit, and the pang was softened by finding a new permanent habit ready to hand. He returned to the office and went on with his work, slightly more owl-eyed, more impenetrably silent than before.

The big door was closed at six. Mr. Dormer lingered about, locking up this, looking through that. John Doughty had been absent that day. Joseph, after writing some letters, had now gone upstairs. Mr. Dormer ushered out the last of the clerks, looked a last time round, and left by the side door. He went up the Middens Alley to his house. On the doorstep he paused. Inside there was firelight and a tiny, continuous cry. His face relaxed for a moment and he went in.

Jane Doughty had found a poor but honest woman to nurse the child. She had but one name, "Benders."

Mr. Dormer stared slightly and went to his evening meal.

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Benders was accommodated in the little garret over the kitchen with the child, but Mr.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Dormer often saw them, as he went out in the morning and again as he came in at night. Any man of fifty suddenly confronted with offspring, any Dormer especially, could do no more and no less than stare. And Benders, a round, red, frowsy, illiterate person, of no qualifications except a warm heart, a few primitive instincts with regard to children confirmed by a habit of rearing her own numerous family, and a plentiful supply of milk, bobbed the baby at him with appropriate noises.

But more than this must have passed behind Mr. Dormer's passive, Doughty-absorbed features. Else why was he to be seen early one morning, just as May was coming in, to issue from his gate before eight o'clock, when only the more laborious of Easthampton were astir, followed by Benders carrying the baby. The little party, two walking and the other sleeping, followed the path along Castle Ditches, dived into the back entrance to one of the inns, came out again in the lower market, crossed Nether Bargate, and turned back into the alleys that led to St. George's-by-the-Bridewell. Slipping in beneath the grim old porch, by the door where the Sanctuary knocker still grinned at them, they were received by the old parish priest and sexton (which proves that the excursion had been arranged) and by one of those individuals who earned his drink—much the same as his living—by being mute at

OUR MR. DORMER

funerals, ringer at weddings, and godfather to such as needed him.

And there, in the mouldy and echoing nave of the old city church, amid the symbols of a pomp and power that were every day losing hold on those who professed allegiance to them, under a wooden painted-and-gilded font-cover fourteen feet high, at a stone font whose carved figures, in the side panels, all had the heads knocked off lest people should worship them, little Stephen Doughty Dormer was blessed and sprinkled with water and called by his name.

It is characteristic of Mr. Dormer that even in this, his last unique act of revolt against the influence of Doughtys' that was steadily engulfing him body and soul, he should call his son by the name of his enslavers—showing how willing was his slavery. Old village instinct bade him have his son christened in the national Church. New fidelity bade him call the child as his employers were called.

The little ceremony droned to its close, amid the rattling of loose diamond panes as the old windows bulged in the morning breeze, and the coughing of the measured-to-order godfather, whose throat was sore in the mornings, as he was wont to explain, from drinking out of damp glasses.

Mr. Dormer suddenly became very active, pressing coin upon the priest, the godfather,

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

the sexton. There was a condition attaching to these gifts that was apparently agreed to, for the three recipients reassured Mr. Dormer continually : " Not a word—not a word, sir, on my honour ! "

The party separated, the priest to his poor parsonage in the alley looking out over the unkempt graveyard, the godfather and sexton to the tap of the Beehive Inn for an early glass, Mr. Dormer, with Benders carrying the baby, back along Castle Ditches to Mr. Dormer's. And the only trace left of the deed is the silent witness in rusty ink on the yellow page of the register of St. George's-by-the-Bridewell.

From that day onward Mr. Dormer sank more and more into the life of Doughtys', and Doughtys' rose up, as it were, and engulfed him. Imperceptibly he got there a little earlier and stayed a little later. And the effect was curiously twofold, for while, on the one hand, he glared at the younger clerks who slipped in on the stroke of nine, or attempted to slip out on the stroke of six, he glared equally at any who approached his books or presumed to any of the special and particular knowledge of the business—glared not with ferocity or surprise, but with the instinct of the animal that sees its nest threatened.

For it was becoming HIS business, even in a sense more peculiar than it was that of the Doughtys'. Joseph Doughty had religion, was

OUR MR. DORMER

constantly out for this or that or the other good or devout exercise. John Doughty had the world and was constantly away. The weight of the business pressed more and more on the slightly hunched shoulders of Mr. Dormer, and with advancing years he appeared to gather himself together, an Atlas supporting the financial existence of Easthampton, Doughtys' to wit.

And the effects of that fatal night in April when he had fired that direful shot and sealed himself by the deed of blood the defender of Doughtys', their goods, their principles and their power, grew, and blossomed, and bore fruit ; though these effects passed him by as Mr. Dormer in his private personality, in his greater life, his life in Doughtys', the reverberation came creeping back to him.

First of all came the crowner's inquest.

There still lingers in the hearts of the English, obvious enough to any one who will study them, or, better still, their daily Press, a love of Deeds of Violence, Shedding of Blood, Sudden Death, and the legal activity that these events entail. As the opportunities for direct gratification of this appetite grow fewer with advancing civilisation, the greater is the demand for vicarious indulgence by means of detailed accounts in public print.

Whatever may have been the origin of this human foible . . . bewildered humanity's relief

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

at decisive action . . . sadistic thirst for gore . . . deepening of emotion in face of death . . . satisfaction with the majesty of functioning law . . . Mr. Dormer's adventure had flattered it. A shot had been fired, a man hit, he had died, his slayer was known and could be apprehended. These bare facts contained all the elements of a public feast. But the printing of the proceedings in the weekly news-sheet was then a lengthy affair. The first enthusiasm was spent in the inns and ale-houses, by those who had been able to squeeze into the room at the George, where the body had been viewed and the inquest held, and who were amply rewarded with liquor for their story.

That story lost nothing in the telling. For if there was a slight disappointment at finding that no one was to hang for it, yet Mr. Dormer's exploit, his bravery, his impressive words, which were reported to have been, "Faced with the possibility of highway robbery, I had no hesitation in firing at the horse. The Miscreant placed himself in the way of the ball for his own ends!" while detracting nothing from his courage, confirmed his innocent, peace-loving character. Captain Darcy, his companion, and next witness, shone with all the lustre of a soldier in war-time plus that of a participant in such an affair. The announcement, by Joseph Doughty, of his intention to recognise Mr. Dormer's devotion in a suitable manner,

OUR MR. DORMER

added to the glamour of the occasion, while the appearance of a printed notice of a reward for the capture of the dead highwayman's confederate, lent the last touch to what was felt to be a toothsome piece of news. The noise of it bellied out, as smoke spreads on a gusty day, from the tap-rooms and snugs into the crowded dwellings of the Laborious ; the more comfortable citizens read of it in the *Courier*, or heard it repeated, within their small select circles of acquaintance. It lived . . . a Seven Days' Wonder, and died as all news dies, and was embalmed in History. But one immediate effect there was : it added very much to the notoriety of Our Mr. Dormer ! Already he was more than a mere clerk of Doughtys', already he was a personality from which the Bank gained, rather than to which it gave substance.

Such was the first effect of Mr. Dormer's pistol shot.

Such was the first direct and tangible effect of Captain Darcy on the Doughty establishment ; and Captain Darcy was, after all, only known to the House by virtue of his connection with Mr. Dormer on the fatal night. But as days went by, Captain Darcy became more and more evident in Easthampton life. His origin was obscure. Born in the seventeen-eighties, no one knew where, and brought up, so some one said, by the housekeeper of one of the big

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

country houses of the south of England, he had been told only that his name was Valentine and that his birthday was in February. Taught a minimum smattering of reading, writing, calculation and quotation from a few Latin authors by the parson of the parish, his real education was carried out by the stable-boys and gamekeepers with whom he had spent three-quarters of his time. The head of the noble family under whose roof he ate and slept would send for him from time to time, look at him, nod and give any directions that seemed necessary. By the age of sixteen he was a tough, long-limbed boy, who could ride, shoot or swim anything in his side of the county, could hold his own at boxing or cards, and was already conscious of a shade of difference between himself and his associates, inclined to have what he asked for within such narrow limits as he knew, and to be the leader and the admiration of the youth of either sex of the teeming dependent population of the great house, who served for bed and board and such privilege as the position carried with it, rather than for regular wages. Brusquely asked by the head of the family if he would like a Commission from the King, he left the good old soul who had reared him, his playmates and his cronies, with a cheerful alacrity for the mess of a marching regiment. He could not have chosen a better moment. England was just embarking on a

OUR MR. DORMER

solid quarter-of-a-century of war. Young Darcy served on three Continents, was wounded time after time, recovered and returned to duty, until at last, on the field of Albuera, a round iron ball, inches in diameter, fired at a range of two hundred yards, crushed his left forearm into pulp. It was amputated on the field with no anaesthetic. He had to lie up for weeks in a Convent. It was the first interruption in a way of life that had been purely, if lightly, selfish. It forced Captain Darcy almost to rumination : with a mind so simple in outlook, so unused to going about a question, the process could hardly be called thinking. He emerged at the earliest possible moment from hospital and from reflection, obtained leave, and set out for England, with a small allowance, some half-pay, no scruples, and a general cheerful pugnacity.

Such was Captain Darcy when he met our Mr. Dormer and introduced himself into the life of Doughtys'. With sufficient physical presence to mix in what were then the best—that is, the small, semi-educated—circles that depended more or less nearly on the Court ; with the sort of cunning no horse could outwit, a head no quantity of wine could fluster, and a constitution nothing could impair, Captain Darcy had come to Easthampton with his mind made up. This was the only result of the weeks he had lain at death's door—a sort of private

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

plan of campaign, drawn up with infantile cool cunning, and based on the assurance that goes with unconscious selfishness.

At that time, if you left Easthampton by Bishopgate Bridge and followed the Seaton road, passed the Quaker burial-ground, you dipped down, as the road rejoined the river, to the hamlet of Eastwick, where the thatched or red-tiled cottages were wedged in innumerable lean-to's, and looked out from small-paned windows on a tranquil road and river, barely stirred by a slight horse or sailing traffic. Some four or five substantial residences, with large gardens full of "Grecian" temples and grottoes, shaded by willow and Lombard poplar, stretched back from the street up the hill. One of these, called the Rectory, was inhabited by Mrs. Blomfield, widow of the late Rector. She was a comfortable, capable woman, whose life had been nicely filled with the small social pretensions and active household duties of her post. The loss of her husband, deeply felt, was by now accustomed; her child was grown up; her income had always been sufficient, her health excellent. At thirty-five, if her complexion had lost the delicacy and her figure the slim outline of twenty years before, she was still a very handsome woman, with the pleasant manners born of self-confidence, and an easy nature undisturbed by too much thought.

The fact that Captain Darcy, after the fatal

journey with Mr. Dormer, went straight to the King's Head Inn, took a room, and then called on Mrs. Blomfield, is not so extraordinary as it seems to-day. The world was a very small one then, the commissioned officers of the Army numbered some few thousands, and all had the entry of Society with an S. A comrade had given Captain Darcy a message, an introduction to his relative, unvisited for years—Mrs. Blomfield of Eastwick. She was well embedded in the only set that had access to money or power. That was all Darcy required. The King's Head was a comfortable if rough country inn, perfectly capable of providing a good bed and a joint of meat, not to say a bottle of wine and excellent fishing. Captain Darcy might just as well have stayed there on his half-pay as in any other spot in the world. From thence to the Rectory was but a step. Mrs. Blomfield would have been a sufficient jumping-off place. The chance falling in with Mr. Dormer was the sort of gambler's luck Darcy attracted and expected.

When, slightly spruced, he was ushered through a rose-framed porch into a sweet-smelling dark hall, cool as a church, and from that into a saloon of French-grey panels, lavender-smelling china bowls and gilt-framed mirrors, it was no new inspiration, but the habit of a lifetime, that made him pull himself up, adjust his neck-cloth, arch his leg, and plant his hand.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Mrs. Blomfield, summoned from killing the hours of the lovely spring day in the garden, glided toward him, radiant. No doubt it was the effect of good health and flowered muslin set off by plump arms and short legs ; to Captain Darcy she seemed a " monstrous fine woman." To her, as he stood drawn up, as it were, " in formation " by the open door-window, he appeared " charming." Tall and still slim, bronzed and slightly—just interestingly—damaged by warfare, he had the urbane boyishness of one who has grown up in Army messes ; and one half-timbered arm is no discredit to a man ; a scar through the eyebrow, when it makes a gentleman goggle slightly as if he were trying to see more of a lady, is no harm.

Mrs. Blomfield, smiling at the crisp hair shading off his temple—a touch that just counteracted his youthful manners—led out into the garden, to her green-painted trellis-work arbour that looked down a green alley to the shining river between poplars and alders.

A pleasant-looking maidservant brought sherry and biscuits. Captain Darcy's axiom that you may judge a house by the wine you drink in it, was not incorrect for the limited circle in which he moved. Nor was he at a loss for conversation, having Mrs. Blomfield's second-cousin-by-marriage's messages to give. The birds sang, the flowers swung their little

OUR MR. DORMER

censers, the sunshine gleamed in the dew ; in the distance the maid joked with the gardener. Captain Darcy, after twenty-five years' soldiering, found it vastly pleasant. Mrs. Blomfield, secretly bored for some time by the society of Mr. Potter the curate, and maudlin Sir Emery Bird from Overwater, showed herself at her best. She was of that blonde, grey-eyed type that shows to advantage when seated in the tranquil peace of such a garden, and that loses so much when it attempts to bustle its budding amplitude about congested streets.

Captain Darcy was invited to dine. He accepted, found the claret as good as the sherry, and the mild excitements of the card-table all he cared to bother with in the state of well-being which was his daily lot. The saloon looked even more comfortable, Mrs. Blomfield even more monstrous fine, by the soft light of candles in branched silver holders. Sir Emery Bird and Mr. Potter, if not thrilling, were correct and gentlemanly.

A few weeks later—barely midsummer—Mrs. Blomfield was standing in the dressing-room, so-called, that had never been used since her husband's death. It was a little, low, panelled room, approached from the roomy, sunny bedroom by a low doorway unnecessarily supported, after the careless, expansive, capricious style of the house, by two pillars of white painted wood. It looked north by a small

casement window, open, for Mrs. Blomfield was listening.

A few days before, Captain Darcy had made her a proposal of marriage. Marriage, so far as Mrs. Blomfield had experienced it, meant a little responsibility and effort, covered over with all that she cared for—comfortable daily habit, pride in oneself and one's surroundings, occupation, companionship. For Darcy, his further acquaintance had added affection to admiration, and a sense of his utter compatibility with herself, to affection. She felt herself "well suited," as she would have expressed it. And just as she had been drawing out the luxury of a slowly-melting consent to its uttermost, she had started and burst into tears. The thought of her son Jack had stabbed through her. Not that there was anything but contentment to be got from the thought of that healthy, vigorous lad of fifteen, but the shock of remembering him—and Mrs. Blomfield, a punctilious mother, slightly in awe of her son, and of the memory of his father, as women of her day were accustomed and encouraged to be, had actually not considered him. It was foreign to her nature to consider what Jack would think if she had another offer of marriage, until the offer of marriage was actually made; and she had put him out of her mind. How would he take it?

Captain Darcy, unversed in women of Mrs.

OUR MR. DORMER

Blomfield's type, had been nonplussed for the moment. To him, women crying meant only one thing, and he had a perfectly clear conscience in this case. He was easily persuaded to wait a week for his answer.

During that time young Jack Blomfield came home for his quarter's holidays.

And now Mrs. Blomfield waited, in the dressing-room, putting a touch here and there to her toilet by aid of the little mirror before which her former husband had shaved. Not that her toilet needed it, but that she secretly hoped that, if she delayed, fate would help her over what she felt to be an awkward moment. She had left Jack in the garden. Captain Darcy had been given leave to present himself. Suddenly she heard their voices together. In a moment her instinct told her all was well. She skipped downstairs feeling twenty years younger.

She came upon them in the little skittle alley at the top of the garden among the vegetables, under the tall elms in the hedge that separated the garden from the fields. They were walking side by side. Captain Darcy, his swagger chastened by his limp, stopped from time to time to point out some detail in a plan he had drawn with the tip of his cane in the dust. He was explaining some episode in the Peninsula with all the gusto of one used to admiration. And the admiration was coming unstinted from

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Jack, who had fallen into step beside the Captain, hands behind back, head slightly on one side, in exact imitation of his model.

Mrs. Blomfield waited a moment watching her two men, and glorying in the fact that neither of them noticed her.

Thus did Fortune favour the Brave. (Mark the phrase !) It was now easy to ask Jack how he would like Captain Darcy for a father. His reply was enthusiastic. Then followed card parties, dinners, and visits, in the number and degree requisite to satisfy the opinion of Eastwick and Easthampton, for the purpose of making known the "contemplated union," as it was called by the *Courier* in a chaste paragraph. The news went as high as John Doughty and Sir Emery Bird when they met at the Club, and as low as to be told with many a dimple and "La !" and "Lawks !" and "Be quiet, now !" by Mrs. Blomfield's stout, cheerful cook to the ostler from the King's Head behind the Laurels on a fine June evening. It went as far as Mrs. Blomfield's second cousin by marriage, he who had first sent Captain Darcy to Easthampton.

The effect was profoundest, perhaps, on the Baronet. For months—years, perhaps—he had sat as near as possible to Mrs. Blomfield as he could, ogling her, obviously on the point of making some serious advance, always just frustrated by the more important things of life,

OUR MR. DORMER

drinking, eating, or playing games and wondering when his wife would die. These occasions would always be followed by a heavy next-morning of reflection ; for Sir Emery, though perhaps the lowest rung of County society, was yet socially above a commoner and could not tell how the County would take it. When he heard the news of the " contemplated union," he experienced a feeling which was no doubt relief, but which showed itself by his remaining drunk for twenty-four hours, and then going up to the County Club and telling John Doughty that Mrs. Blomfield was a monstrous fine woman and Darcy a gallant fellow, and that he, Sir Emery, would see to it that the contract between two such fine and gallant people was duly celebrated. He would give a Water Party, and John Doughty should be of the guests.

Sir Emery was not only the smallest County magnate, but he was one of the most old-fashioned. His grandfather, a simple city merchant like the Doughtys', had his tomb on the sweating, cobweb-covered walls of St. George's-by-the-Bridewell, and had obtained his baronetcy under Walpole. The present Sir Emery, inheriting riches he had never made, had inherited also the thirst of his ancestors (honest weavers working twelve hours a day), and their lack of perception of the finer shades of County behaviour. Water parties were already *vieux jeu*. But he made a worse blunder.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

There used to linger on, in those days, a yearly festival known as Oyster Fair. It appears that, long before the Danes gave the hamlet its present name, when the whole valley from Seaton to Easthampton was one great estuary, the wretched aborigines, who lived chiefly on fresh-water oysters, used to hold some sort of festival on or near the sandy beach now represented by the Seaton road where it runs through Eastwick. Whether it was the last catch or first catch of those now obsolete molluscs, we shall never know, but it is certain that Blagovarius, in his Itinerary, records the pagan festival, which consisted in his day of a procession carrying nets and paddles, and cooking oysters on an altar, with incidents usual to such occasions.

After Blagovarius came Saxon and Dane and centuries of darkness. The next record we have is of the Christian festival, presided over by the Abbot of Holme (that great grey ruin that still stands a few miles down the river). The estuary had been cramped down by water-mills to the present navigable river channel running between rich meadows; the oysters had disappeared. The business had become an annual tribute of fish brought from Seaton and landed at Eastwick for the benefit of the Lord Abbots, on whose escutcheon (see Johann's *Memorials*) the three oyster-shells still figure meaningless.

OUR MR. DORMER

But oh ! impermanence of all things human. The Lord Abbot of Holme, twice a prince (once spiritually, once temporally), went the same way as Blagovarius with his Roman road from Eye-castra or Achester, as he called Easthampton, to Porta Seatonensis. The abbey of Holme is now but a great mass of crumbling stone in a meadow, part windmill, part cowshed. Three oyster-shells carved in the stone of an arch forty feet high are slowly washing out, and the once magnificent church is left roofless to bats and the wind of heaven. Not so the dependencies—the farm outbuildings a mile away—*supra aqua*—"Overwater," as it came to be called when an Elizabethan adventurer got the grant of the land and built the present house. And he, the Elizabethan, went his way also, and his seed diminished and ceased, and Sir Emery Bird's grandfather bought the place and reigned in his stead.

Amid all this, one thing remained permanent—the actual average human material. Never quite succumbing to climate and famine, to flood and disease, surviving the assaults of wild beasts and wilder men, outliving Roman and Northerner, Abbot and Adventurer, the labourers and bargees of Eastwick clung to their tiny bit of existence, between the river and the heathery hill ; and with them, never written down by them, hardly spoken of, lived on the idea of a festival—a holiday—a respite from

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

the monotonous round of earning enough to eat, that should occur about midsummer ; and to this they held. Nothing would induce them to work on the twenty-fourth of June. They still called it Oyster Fair—though the slow river that gleamingly reflected the church tower had contained no oysters for eight hundred years.

Now, whether it was mere stupidity, or whether it was the people's blood in his veins, we shall never know ; but it is certain that Sir Emery Bird chose the twenty-fourth of June for the Water Party that was to celebrate the Darcy-Blomfield match. Oyster Fair had, of course, been disregarded by the County and by the wealthier citizens for years. The invitations were sent out, and, with exception of the happy pair and one or two others, were declined. Water Parties were stale, Sir Emery & Co. small beer. It occurred to no one that Sir Emery's party would coincide with the half-forgotten popular festival.

Cockman, the barge-builder, however, had a busy time. There were no pleasure craft, properly speaking, on the river. People of substance, like Sir Emery and Mrs. Blomfield, all owned, of course, a wide, blunt-nosed rowing boat, in the same way that they had a weather-vane on their stables or a mounting-block by their door. Then there were the two or three boats Cockman let out on hire for fishing, all

OUR MR. DORMER

to be furbished up, re-painted, and to have cushions and rails and a bit of scroll-work renewed or added. Cockman, like the handicraftsmen of his age, was an artist.

The *rendezvous* was to be opposite the church ; and there, at the appointed time, arrived Sir Emery in his barge, the sail hoisted but idle in those tree-embowered reaches, and the two pair oars in the hands of his liveried men. Punctually John Doughty arrived in his curricule, and a little later Mrs. Blomfield was handed down by her cousin, Surgeon-Major Blomfield, while Darcy walked along from the King's Head. Meanwhile, Oyster Fair was hardly making itself felt.

At present the general public were few and decorous. Some Easthampton tradespeople picnicked on the broad strip of green between the wooden piles of the river-bank, and the white dust of the Seaton road beneath the churchyard wall. A few apprentices were splashing about in a punt, when Mrs. Blomfield tripped across to the carpeted gangway pushed out for her.

Her way of moving depended on so many small, unconscious habits, an untroubled mind, abundant and leisurely nourishment, almost entire lack of use of the lower limbs (Mrs. Blomfield's day varied from sitting in the saloon or morning-room, to sitting in the garden or carriage), small, undeveloped feet in tight low slippers with but little heel, voluminous

skirts and very tight corset. She settled down on the well-cushioned thwart to which Sir Emery handed her in such a way that the crisp fine stuff of her dress bellied out in puffs and folds, hiding her feet and outline to her waist. Her hands crossed in her lap, her forearms bare to the elbow, her neck uprightly balanced above the well-protected bust, glowed warm against the dead white. Her instinct told her she was looking her best. Her only conscious reflection was admiration of Darcy. John Doughty's salute she acknowledged without dwelling on him. He impressed her disagreeably as being "clever," whatever she understood by that. Sir Emery deserved a smile for providing this setting for her, and his wife (in bottle-green silk, with parasol and coal-scuttle straw hat) looked battered as a rose after rain, and made but a foil.

Sir Emery gave a sign, the gangway was pulled in, and the rowers with a "Yo, ho!" bent to their oars. In the second barge the band (in sky-blue and yellow, with cockades; euphonium, clarinet, fife, trumpet, and big drum and cymbals, the latter played by a disillusioned but cheerful Negro) struck up. The apprentices cheered, the picnickers stared and waved, and the *cortège* moved off at a good two miles an hour down river to Overwater.

It was a perfect summer afternoon. In that eastern county full of waterways, and therefore

OUR MR. DORMER

comparatively low in rainfall, the foliage was burnished, magnificent. Great galleons of cloud swung slowly across the immense horizon, unnarrowed by any considerable hill ; drifts of lime-grove or garden scent trailed in the general atmosphere of hay and sunshine. But Sir Emery and his guests had eyes for none of it. Mrs. Blomfield was happy, Lady Bird at peace, as far as she could be, poor soul ; the men had the grown-up-boyish animal spirits of the time, and the prospect of a good dinner ahead.

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But if the Water Party contained some of the most important people in Easthampton and its district, there was other life going its way in that thriving town. Mr. Dormer, for instance, in Doughtys' counting-house was very much alive. By six o'clock his face bore as great an expression of perturbation as he ever allowed (in accordance with his idea of the dignity of the business) to appear. He held in his hand the blue sheet of the London letter, with its "Respected Friends Thomas and Elijah Hopper," its lists of bills for presentation, its acknowledgment of bills duly to hand ; its queries regarding the currency, its problems for solution, many of them urgent in 1813 ; and at the end, after the words "thy cousins——" no signature—an unheard-of omission.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Joseph Doughty had been absent since early in the day, gone about a foreclosure with the lawyer, with whom he had also important business regarding a petition to Parliament from the Society of Friends. John Doughty had gone and not returned. Mr. Dormer had never, in all his years of faithful service, known such a situation. He glared at the youngest of the nine clerks (disguised into a premature middle age by the square-tailed coat and strapped trousers that he wore), who said humbly :

“Please, Mr. Dormer, Mr. John is gone to the Oyster Fair at Eastwick !”

Mr. Dormer glared ; not so much at the speaker, a likely youth named Chalker, who copied the letters in a round hand as fair—or very nearly—as the round hand of Mr. Dormer himself, on which in fact he had carefully modelled himself, as at the idea thus presented. But the likely youth, for once, stood his ground, emboldened by the fact that he wanted to go to Oyster Fair himself, and found strength in the apparent community of his tastes with those of Mr. John Doughty. He was about to venture upon further advances, being a likely youth, when Mr. Dormer cut him short :

“There is nothing further for you to-night !” and proceeded to lock up with much noise and precision.

His mind was, in fact, made up. Having

OUR MR. DORMER

seen all secure and delivered the keys to Jane Doughty, he went across the Middens Alley, up George Yard, and demanded a chaise ; nor did he feel, as he did so, as though he were adding with his own hand the last touch to the Fate prepared for him.

In the usual course such a request from Mr. Dormer of Doughtys' Bank would have received immediate attention. But on this night of nights Armes had let out all he had of horse-flesh and wheeled conveyance. Something that would have been panic in any other man stirred in Mr. Dormer. Gazing from the sunlit entry of George Yard across the Market, he was at a loss what next to say or do, when he was accosted by Saint, the mercer, who was taking his wife and daughter to see the fun in his "carry-all," as he called it, a four-wheeled gig with the hinder seats back to back, a type that afterwards became popular as the "jaunting-car." He waved his whip ; the immense feather stout Mrs. Saint was wearing nodded and balanced above her hat ; he was offering Mr. Dormer a seat, and Mrs. Saint was being persuasive. Mr. Dormer climbed up behind, back to back with Mrs. Saint, and away they went. Mr. Dormer rather wondered at the number of people in the street, until he recollected that every one would of course be going to the Fair. There was a sort of effervescence in the air : bent-shouldered, white-faced

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

weavers, square-built, fleshy-faced carters, and riverside folk, with blowsy, red-cheeked wives, apprentices, and that darker, more motley ragged crowd, horse thieves, harlots, what not, were streaming up from Dog Lane with all the interest of a living to earn added to the prospect of pleasure. For some time after he had allowed himself to notice the fact, he wondered why people were pointing and laughing in his direction. He learned presently, by having his nose and neck tickled by the impossible feather Mrs. Saint was wearing, that from his position he appeared to the public to be wearing it himself in the back of his hat. He leaned on one side to try to avoid the illusion. But somehow he seemed unwarrantably mixed up with Oyster Fair. He had not, of course, explained to Saint why he wanted to go to Eastwick at that moment of that particular day. Saint assumed that it was to take part in the jollifications. The London letter was buttoned inside his breast pocket. His mission was enfolded in his heart. Pride feels no pinch. Mr. Dormer was proud of the confidence reposed in him. He had said nothing to Saint, he would say nothing to any one else. Let people cheer. They did. The Saint conveyance had quite a progress along Bishopgate and over the bridge, and up the hill and past the burial-ground and down again to Eastwick, to the King's Head. The house was doing a

OUR MR. DORMER

roaring trade. The yard next the road, into which Saint turned the carry-all, was full of groups, talking, laughing, playing loutish jokes, and passing pewter and earthen mugs back to the perspiring tapster and his mates, to be filled again and again. When Saint's conveyance drew up, drunken roysterers greeted it with wishes for "a fine day for the Frolic!"

Amid all the clamour and confusion Mr. Dormer descried Mr. John Doughty's groom, standing a little apart, as a good and well-paid servant should, looking on. From him Mr. Dormer learned that Mr. John had gone down river with a party, and would certainly come back to the King's Head, where his curricule was put up, to drive home. That settled it. The mail was lost. The letter must go by special messenger. Then Saint hailed him, to take gin-and-water, and he found himself in a boat, clawed hold of by Mrs. Saint, who, between gin-and-water and the unaccustomed motion, was giving vent to a series of shrieks that started very loud and fizzled out in giggles.

The noise was indescribable. As they zig-zagged down stream, slowly and with difficulty on account of the other craft, the open meadows of the south bank on their right were being steadily peopled by the fortunate. On the north bank the poorest of the crowd remained, having no boats, and the wide strip of grass opposite the church seethed like an ant-hill.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Clowns and tumblers played among them, a gipsy fellow led a bear, and an old woman told fortunes. Malt liquors were sold at tables enclosed by a rail beneath trees. The wall of the churchyard was a long line of spectators, and behind the church could be seen the white caps and kerchiefs of Mrs. Blomfield's maids and the round, wigless heads of her men, peering over the wall of the Rectory garden.

The gathering shadows were dispersed by the lights that began to appear in the spun-glass, many-paned bow-windows next the street, one candle to each pane.

In vain did Mr. Dormer pluck Saint by the sleeve, and ask to be put on shore. Saint was greeting acquaintances, answering jests, cheers and hulloas, and from time to time urging his two rowers (who thoroughly entered into the spirit of the moment) to lie alongside the floating tap that had been established on a timber-barge moored amidstream.

Mr. Dormer for the third time that night became perturbed : would he ever escape from the folly of this crowd, when John Doughty did appear, to get the precious letter signed ? Why had he ever got into the boat ? Why, in fact, he hadn't. After speaking to John Doughty's groom, and ordering a special messenger to saddle and wait, he had rashly entered the waterside garden of the King's Head, to oblige Mrs. Saint, who said, La ! she couldn't stand,

OUR MR. DORMER

her legs were giving way (as well they might !). What with Saint's childish excitement to get into a boat and be amongst the fun, and the press of people, Mr. Dormer had been propelled from the quayside aboard, without really meaning it.

He tried to influence the rowers. They, however, were all for staying afloat, as every time they lay against the tapster's barge, Saint, refreshing himself, saw to it that they were not neglected.

But "Fortune favours the Brave," as the popular song of those days had it. When the revelling was at its height, a sort of murmur, a vague shifting of boats and people made itself perceptible. Into the circle of twilight and reflected candle and torch light in front of the church green, swung Sir Emery's barge, high, solid and ornate by comparison with the surrounding craft. Then a sort of miracle happened. The lookers-on saw standing by the thwart more than a man, a God, raising by the hand a woman, a consort of unearthly beauty. Had the crowd been composed merely of the poorest, least sophisticated, most laborious, there might have followed one of those almost biblical scenes of adoration that occurred more than once to Nelson, to Sydney Smith, to many another hero of that tremendous decade. But there was too strong a middle-class, semi-educated element present. It was whispered

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

immediately that the figures in view were Captain Darcy and Widow Blomfield. And "Gad, what a gallant fellow!" and "La! what a fine woman!" and other expressions of middle-class opinion, filtered in with, and destroyed the far more primitive emotion that was abroad.

In sober fact, Darcy looked well. His carriage was that of a man who had lived an open-air, dangerous life. His scarlet coat and white breeches and stockings fitted him. His clean-shaved face and square smallish head had a look of health and well-being natural after a good dinner and enough to drink. And he was happy. When he took Mrs. Blomfield's hand he could feel running up her wrist to her finger-tips a faint vibration like an electric current. He knew that feeling; in fact, he expected it. That was how women went when he took any pains that they should. It did not displease him that people should make way for him, stare at him—and what? They were cheering. Standing beside Mrs. Blomfield, he squared himself slightly, as if on parade.

Mrs. Blomfield was physically at the zenith of such beauty as she possessed. Her easy quiet life made her respond generously to attention, entertainment, display. She was getting attention from Darcy, with a crowd as background; entertainment and a good dinner

OUR MR. DORMER

rendered her amiable, all dimpled ; and she had her precious sense that everything, from her advantageous position athwart to the beauty of the summer evening around, was helping her look her best.

At that moment, to put a finishing touch to the picture, Sir Emery's band came in sight. They had been regaled in the kitchen at Overwater on beer and heavy Spanish wines, and had long passed from the stage of hilarity to that of sulky quiescence. In particular the Negro drummer, whom the man with the trumpet had been beating to make him row, sat sunk over his oar. In the gentle twilight of the English summer evening, with its golden green and its soft blue, that grinning, ebony head with gleaming teeth and eyes had no place. It was a violence, like Lady Bird's dress, or the blue and yellow liveries. But there was something pathetic and awe-inspiring about the awakening of the poor black, as, trailing behind Sir Emery's barge, the band barge swam into the circle of light and noise before Church Green. He flung aside his oar, his snuffling breathing suddenly deepened and soared into a droning nasal chant, not unlike the sound made by the bagpipes. He seized his drumstick and cymbals and began to wallop his instrument as though his life depended on it, eyes fixed, and gleaming body hunched on the thwart.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Something hypnotic in his appearance and the fearful din he made, overbore the surrounding noises, and overcame his fellow-instrumentalists. Not easily daunted by convention, and more than half bemused by the fumes rising from the drink they had absorbed, they took their instruments and began, at a nod from the trumpeter, their favourite and best-known tune, "Now Fortune favours the Brave."

It was the moment at which Darcy, stiffly erect, was handing Mrs. Blomfield across the gangway to the landing, where her maid held open her garter-blue cloak. The crowd probably took the coincidence as part of an arranged programme, and as the third cheer died away, joined in the chorus :

Now Fortune favours the Brave,
Who plead with the Fair, for a smile !

Mrs. Blomfield, with her maid and man, disappeared across the green towards her little white-painted gate at the end of the churchyard wall. Darcy paused a moment upon the gangway to bow ; then, accompanied by the portly Surgeon-Major, followed his betrothed.

But the enthusiasm of the crowd was now thoroughly aroused. After Darcy there appeared on the gangway John Doughty. He had just taken his leave of the somnolent Sir Emery, huddled in the stern. As he emerged from the comparative darkness of the barge

OUR MR. DORMER

on to the brilliantly lighted gangway, he was recognised in an instant. Only the week before a paragraph had appeared in the *Courier* to the effect that "a deputation of citizens, headed by our worthy This, and our well-respected That, had waited upon John Doughty, Esquire, at his place of business, for the purpose of urging upon him the desirability of his being nominated as their representative to Parliament." There lay behind this paragraph chiefly the fact that the traders of Easthampton were sick of war and desired peace, partly for the good of trade and partly because in politics even more than in dress, novelty is the Ideal. There was a general idea that John Doughty might be trusted to vote Buff, both from Quaker opinions and Buff ancestry. He was also better liked, if less respected, than Joseph, which was all to his advantage in the political arena.

Now the electorate of Easthampton at that date was tiny. Out of a population of upwards of fifty thousand, only some hundreds of free-men and others could hope to have a voice in the representation of the city. Of these by no means all could hope to benefit by political action. Some of the latter were no doubt present, near by the southern bank, amid the better-dressed crowd, and cheered John Doughty with feeling. But a much greater ovation greeted him as he unwittingly stepped into what

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

was later to be called "the limelight." The more ragged, shiftless crowd that seethed across Church Green to the churchyard wall, filled the King's Head gardens and the road beyond, though they had no hope of electing anybody, being represented by anybody, or being anything but shortlived, hopeless and helpless, yet had in their hearts a deep instinct, relic no doubt of a time when they had mattered, which, mixed with beer, gregariousness, and the sense of a holiday, made them shout with one accord, "Doughty and Peace!" And being an English crowd, they saw nothing comic in shouting thus when only three minutes earlier they had been shouting and singing for Darcy, who represented to them, in his person and history, all the glories of the military spirit.

But there was greater sport in store yet. John Doughty bowed slightly and made his way along the gangway, and Sir Emery's rowers were already shoving off; a gap of some inches had appeared between the gangway and the thwart of the barge (luckily heavy and hard to move), when—who was this who seemed to take an ungainly flying leap from Saint's boat, right across Sir Emery's barge, scramble, cling, and finally pull himself up on to the gangway and stand upon it, as the gap of shining water between the shore and the barge widened from a foot to a yard?

At the first inkling of what he was about to

OUR MR. DORMER

do, there had spread a dead silence ; then, as he leapt and clung, a volley of sporting exclamations : “ Oo-oh !—he slips !—no, he doesn’t !—he ’ll be drowned !—no, he won’t ! ”

Finally, as he stood erect some one recognised him :

“ Why, it’s Dormer ! ”—and a ringing cheer, greater in volume than those that had greeted Darcy, rang out as he trotted, stiff-legged, along the landing-stage after John Doughty, and only those who were nearest heard him gasp :

“ Mr. John, sir, the letter ! ”

They disappeared together into the King’s Head, where the special messenger summoned by Mr. Dormer stood by his saddled horse in the corner of the yard talking to John Doughty’s groom, who was putting his pair into the curricule. And then, only then, alone in the private room, did Mr. Dormer unbutton his coat and produce, undamaged, almost uncreased, the London letter for signature. John Doughty smiled, signed, bade Mr. Dormer good-night, and drove away.

Mr. Dormer watched the messenger start on his journey, took a glass of brandy-and-water to restore himself, sitting alone in the private room and sipping it slowly. When he came out into the yard, the Saturnalia was subsiding. It was now dark, a soft midsummer night ; the better sort of citizen was going or had gone home,

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

Saint among them ; the carry-all no longer stood beneath the shed. In a stream of light from the door of the tap sat the black drummer on his drum, staring before him, shrunk and collapsed. His last frenzy on the drum seemed to have taken the life from him. In the tap, in the gardens and on the green, quarrels were arising, thumps, thuds, cries, and the sound of broken glasses. In the road and round the stocks on the green where a few couples still danced, the poorer women drove their trade, picking out the tipsiest of the loiterers, drawing them into dark corners. By the waterside there was some one crying out that he was being robbed, sounds of a scuffle and a splash, and people running.

But Mr. Dormer had eyes and ears for none of these things. His mission was performed, his duty done. He plodded homeward among the crowd, his shoulders hunched, his feet slightly splayed, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on a point a few yards ahead. To him Oyster Fair was nothing ; the curious moment of publicity that had overtaken him had clean passed from his mind and gone. Along the road and down the hill to Bishopgate Bridge, he was counting—so many hours to the stage where the messenger must change horses, so many more to the next stage. The London letter would be at Hoppers' by eleven.

He reached this conclusion as he reached the

OUR MR. DORMER

Middens Alley, let himself into his house, and slept the sleep of the just.

Two days later, as he stood solemnly counting crisp Bank of England notes, tough, leathery country banknotes, gold and silver coin of all denominations, he was called into the parlour. He found the brothers Doughty in their usual attitudes : Joseph seated at his desk, John standing before the fireplace. The latter was speaking :

“ . . . on grounds of policy I cannot but think it useful. Should we decide that I had better stand, we require the interest of such people as Sir Emery. Indeed, I thought it was allowed between us that I should . . . but here is Dormer ! ”

Joseph Doughty turned and gazed with his faint smile at Mr. Dormer.

“ A faithful man, Friend Dormer.”

In his hand he held the reply letter brought back that morning from Hoppers' in Lombard Street, in which, after sundry matters had been treated, came the words : “ We think it right to inform thee that thy letter was delivered to us by special messenger, who carries this reply. We debit thee . . . guineas, his fee.”

“ What did you spend out of pocket ? ” asked John.

Mr. Dormer produced from the inner bastions of his almost leathern waistcoat a folded slip, to which referring, he gave the amount.

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

“Thou wilt charge petty expenses, and repay thyself,” continued Joseph.

“We think highly of your zeal and care,” put in John ; but as the elder brother stopped with close-pursed lips, he went on : “I leave it to you, brother, to acquaint Dormer.”

Joseph nodded slightly and turned a little more towards Mr. Dormer.

“Friend Dormer, thou wilt sign our letter in future.”

Mr. Dormer’s jaw dropped. It was not in the capacity of the man to have imagined such a thing. And John Doughty, the less “plain” Quaker, came to his assistance with explanation.

“You will sign for us, in the London letter, and in any other place where it may be necessary. We are thinking, perhaps, of my standing for Parliament, and my brother Joseph is much occupied. You have the knowledge——”

“And faithfulness,” put in Joseph.

“So that we are informing our cousins of Lombard Street.” John held out the blue sheet of that day’s London letter, on which appeared the sentence, “We will thank thee to honour the signature of our Mr. Dormer, as below, for us, as our own.”

“You can let this pass round the office,” concluded John.

Mr. Dormer took the letter, which trembled slightly between his fingers. His eyebrows arched themselves like an owl’s. He could not

OUR MR. DORMER

look at his employers. His mouth opened and shut, but no words came forth. Then training, instinct—that mysterious amalgam of these and other causes that we know as character, the name of a result of various forces working together—triumphed. Mr. Dormer gave his short bow, that, with its movement of the knees, somehow carried a faint reminiscence of a well-taught village “bob,” from which no doubt it had developed, turned and left the parlour.

He had become Our Mr. Dormer in very deed.

The London letter, containing what was virtually his appointment, passed from hand to hand round the shop among the nine clerks, and was brought back by the youngest, the likely lad. There was a general feeling that Mr. Dormer ought to do something to celebrate the event, but he went to his dinner without making any proposition. Old Swan, the book-keeper next in importance to Mr. Dormer’s self, thereupon took it to himself to invite every one to the tap of the George that same evening. They all accepted. And round a table garnished with pigs’ trotters and toasted cheese, having each imbibed at least a quart of malt liquor, while they took to aid digestion such sedatives as rum shrub, gin-and-water and brandy-and-water, Swan entertained them with a faithful account of Mr. Dormer’s appearance at Oyster Fair ; and Chalker, the likely lad,

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE BRAVE

gave a lifelike imitation of Mr. Dormer scrambling from one boat to another, and along the gangway after John Doughty, and a highly ornamental one of the words spoken on either side ; of Mr. John having said, " God, Dormer, is that thee ? " (by mistake) ; of Mrs. Blomfield's apotheosis, and of the inebriated nigger. And the likely lad, becoming more and more likely as the evening progressed, sang a song about " Stout hearts and true," and all was very nice and jolly, though an acute observer might have argued that the firstfruits of Mr. Dormer's promotion had been no small crop of jealousy.

For with sure instinct Swan had grasped the inwardness of Mr. Dormer's appointment to sign. He, Dormer, was no longer a fellow clerk. He had climbed to realms, if not supernal, yet next flight to it. He had in a sense *made himself* Our Mr. Dormer, with results that were to stretch out down the stream of his history, like the ripple of a stone flung into a smooth current.

PART II

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

PART II

The Age of Gentility

A RARE fine evening in July 1837 ; yet the weather and the young Queen were the only things that seemed smiling and hopeful. Or perhaps, thought Mr. Dormer to himself, as he walked slowly, very slowly, up Bishopgate, the fact was that he wasn't feeling quite the thing. But being of that simple cast of mind which feels that it is constant and permanent, and that surrounding phenomena change while it remains stationary, he did not admit even to himself that he was getting old—very old. He only admitted that things were in a bad way. It was the long war that had filled all his young time, that had done all the harm ; the wrong sort of people had got on the top, and there was nothing but speculation and display. Look at this new-fangled paving, and the glass shop-fronts everybody was having put in ! Doughtys', under Mr. Dormer's management, had suffered none of these things. Middens Alley was still cobbled and Doughtys' clerks still worked behind wooden partitions in what had been obviously two ordinary living-rooms. Mr. Dormer considered that all blaze and glitter was radically unsound ; there was no honest return for it. It was an attempt, like so many

OUR MR. DORMER

nowadays, to get people to buy what they didn't need. Not that people had much money to buy anything with. Times had been bad ever since Peace was declared (it seemed like yesterday, but it was twenty-two years ago), and Doughtys' had been hard put to it. But Mr. Dormer had seen them through. He had all that confidence of an old man at the end of a somewhat narrow career of which he has been completely master. He moved slowly along Middens Alley, when one of these new-fangled policemen touched his hat. What was it? A window open. Mr. Dormer's eyes opened and brightened—suddenly, as a gas jet flares when turned too quickly. Was something going to threaten the Bank?—his bank—his life—his everything. He hastened his steps considerably, and arrived at his side door.

For many a year now he had lived in the Bank House, ever since poor Mr. Joseph took that chill while at the Friends' Annual Assembly in London, and had "gone off" so suddenly, as people did in those days. John Doughty, of course, had never come to live there—not in his line. He had gone all the other way, had John. So Mr. Dormer had come to live in the Bank House with his son.

As he opened the door with his long heavy key, it was that son, now twenty-four years old, whom he called by name.

"Stephen!"

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

The name echoed round the stone hall, with heavy chairs against its wainscot, and its staircase with carved balustrade, of which the rail was as wide as a saddle, and great square balusters, two to each broad, shallow stair.

Above the obscurity of the first floor was a ceiling on which was modelled in plaster, between two trophies, a baby Jove riding on an eagle. From the drooping beak of the bird hung a lamp.

The window that was open gave from the lower stone passage that led to the kitchen out on to Middens Alley. The policeman was regarding it curiously.

Like all his kind, Mr. Dormer was in two minds about these new police. While the Bank Manager in Mr. Dormer approved of them in principle, and the "modern" progressive man that Mr. Dormer felt himself to be considered them a great improvement on the "watch," the instinctive Englishman that Mr. Dormer so deeply was, resented them in some curious way.

He called again sharply : " Stephen ! " and then, allowing himself to drop into the tones his village ancestors may have used to their apprentices : " Boy ! "

No answer. It would be difficult to say if Mr. Dormer were more alarmed or annoyed. He had always boasted " The place is never left unguarded." He had said, before he went out, that he should not be long. He had,

OUR MR. DORMER

in fact, only been down to the top of Dog Lane to the bookbinders, to remind them that the new ledgers must be ten in number, not six, as the business had so increased. And here was the place empty, and a window open ! No, surely not empty. He called again :

“ Mrs. Benders ! ”

The excellent woman who had nursed the little Stephen in his motherless infancy had moved into the Bank House with Mr. Dormer. She was now dignified by the title of “ Mrs.” Benders, and had a room to herself : a promoted pantry, as it were, furnished for her (she was never known to have had any belongings of her own). She was eminently suitable for the post. She at once adored and managed young Stephen Doughty Dormer, took care that Mr. Dormer’s meals were ready at a moment’s notice, at such intervals as the needs of the business dictated, ruled the maids with the rigour of one who has risen from the ranks, and defended the household from tradesmen as only those can, whose youth has subsisted on penn’orths bought at market stalls. She would be in the kitchen, or her own room, looking after “ those girls,” as she called them. But there was no answer.

Mr. Dormer made up his mind without a moment’s hesitation. He asked the constable to step inside, closed the door, and pointed to one of the big wooden chairs. Then he went

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

down the three stone steps and along the echoing passage between the presses into the great old kitchen with its high roof (it was built jutting out from the plan of the house), its gleaming dish-covers, its great clock, solemnly naming the minutes as they went. A well-made-up fire winked and snored in the stove. One or two chairs set at angles to the table gave the place an appearance of having been hastily deserted.

Mr. Dormer passed on into the little passage that led to the garden beyond the scullery—empty ; and Mrs. Benders' room, where some sewing lay on the table and her cat was asleep.

It was from the little arched, creeper-framed window of this room that he saw, at the length of the garden, Mrs. Benders and the maids engaged in some occupation.

Stepping into the garden, he called : “ Mrs. Benders ! ”

She was deaf, but after due nudging and pointing by one of the girls, she came hobbling down the gravel path between the clipped shrubs, gay borders and drooping branches.

“ Where 's Mr. Stephen ? ”

“ In his room.”

“ No, he 's not.”

Mrs. Benders had rather the air of humouring Mr. Dormer :

“ Oh ! well, he 's not far off.”

“ There 's a window open.”

OUR MR. DORMER

"That was all shut." Coming from the eastern side of England, it was racially impossible for Mrs. Benders to say "They were" or "It was."

"What are you all doing out here?"

"Well, Mr. Stephen said he tripped over that piece of carpet at the top of his stairs, so I told the girls to get it down, because we haven't the time with all there is to do a-day-time; and Mr. Stephen said he would be about, so we took it out to get the best of the light, and they're getting——"

But Mr. Dormer was gone. He made his way along the gravel path, through the layers of sweetness the summer evening was drawing from flower and herb, from fruit and leaf, at a pace really surprising, considering his age. Up the steps into the kitchen he went, through its warm and drowsy, clock-punctuated silence, along the stone passage, past the policeman, sitting wooden-faced in his chair, up the great stairs, into his own spacious, solitary bedroom, with two windows giving on to the garden; simple, almost devoid of furniture, with its dark lantern and police rattle standing ready on the mantelshelf; through the empty guest chambers, only half furnished, for Mr. Dormer seldom had people to stay with him, having no relations of his own; and when Jane Doughty came to stay, she did not expect luxury, would, indeed, have objected to it. Then there was Stephen's

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

room—the room of the modern young man in 1837. He had inherited none of the stern love of simplicity of his mother's family, but, as if he derived most from Mrs. Benders' upbringing, seemed a soft, sentimental youth, which fitted in with Mr. Dormer's inveterate treatment of him as a mere child. There were more curtains over the great fanlight window, and more carpet on the floor, than in the other three rooms put together. That was Mrs. Benders, spoiling him. The only bare patch on the floor was that from which she had taken the piece of carpet that wanted mending. The oval mahogany and rosewood toilet glass showed Mr. Dormer a lined and wrinkled face with peering eyes under the eyebrows; but Mr. Dormer was not impressionable, stared back at himself and passed on. He glanced up the low passage that led out over the kitchen, where the maids slept in little rooms like horse-boxes, and up the short flight that led to the second floor, calling: "Stephen! are you there?"—passed up and down, glanced in at each door, at neat beds, bare walls, scrubbed floors, and chairs and presses in their several places.

Mr. Dormer's alarm and resentment grew and grew. Not that he imagined anything happening to Stephen, Mr. Dormer had no imagination to speak of. The feelings he had about the matter rested on the Bank. His Bank. The Bank. It had been left.

OUR MR. DORMER

Such was the attitude of Mr. Dormer towards that great three-storey mass of bricks and mortar, stone and timber, with its strong-room whose walls were a yard thick, and whose door, of iron, and large as that of the proverbial barn, was fastened by an iron bolt six feet long and weighing some hundredweight, operated by a worm-and-wheel gear. For Mr. Dormer was a very primitive man. It was not so much that he feared some concrete danger overcoming his stronghold. It was more that a lack of reverence had been shown to his God. He disliked its being neglected as men once disliked the oracle of Delphi to stand untended, or the altar of Canterbury to be without its Sanctus flame. He feared that who-knows-what pollution might invade the precious institution. And as he stood on the landing, at the head of the stairs under the lamp pendent from the plaster eagle's beak, there came through the open windows the Cathedral chimes, five hundred years old, mellow as wine, true as friendship. He listened to the end, through the pause, and counted the strokes of the great bell. Nine. The calm certainty of the well-known sound, the habit of the regular idea, restored him.

Stephen or no Stephen, he would go round the place with the policeman, see that everything was all right and go to bed. He had hardly taken the step to the head of the stairs, when there burst out beneath him in the twilight

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

the sound of a struggle, and two voices : “ Keep quiet ! ”—“ Let me go ! ”—“ Come now ! ”—“ Who are you ? ”

Mr. Dormer arrived at the foot of the stairs at the same moment as Mrs. Benders got there from the kitchen with a candle. By its light they found struggling on the floor the policeman and—young Stephen Dormer.

Mr. Dormer was petrified. He stood on the bottom step, glaring under his eyebrows, unable to speak. It was Mrs. Benders who effectually sorted out the combatants by running at them, grabbing their heads alternately with her free hand and pulling, shouting in one of those porter-thickened voices, “ Oh, Master Stephen ! let him alone, you fool ! what are you thinking of ? ” etc.

There was a moment of heavy breathing and silence. The policeman recovered first. Picking up his hat, he began :

“ Now, young fellow, I’ll trouble you to step along with me ! ” when Mrs. Benders interrupted.

Fixing him with her eye, she made a sound only expressible on paper as “ Hist ! ” accompanying it with a backward motion of the head, a jerk of the thumb, a leer and a darting of the tongue at the corner of the mouth, such as the red-nosed comedian of the music-hall was to copy half a century later. It was sufficient. Grumbling slightly for form’s sake, the police-

OUR MR. DORMER

man followed her down the stone passage to the kitchen, where the maids were just setting about their supper (sheep's head and braised onions and stout). Cheerful voices echoed along the stone passage for the following hours, and at eleven the policeman could be heard leaving the side door, whistling and slapping his thigh.

Left alone, the Dormers, father and son, stared a little. Then Our Mr. Dormer said :

“ How did you come here ? ”

“ I got in by the window.”

“ You must have got out by the window too.”

The younger man hung his head.

“ And left it open. It was pointed out to me by the police officer. What induced you ? ”

Into that query Mr. Dormer put all his incapacity for imagining how people could act so. But Mr. Dormer's lack of imagination was to stand a severer shock when his son replied :

“ I went to see Miss Darcy, sir. We wish to marry.”

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Young Mr. Dormer was a shade more shapely than his father. The Alden strain in him from his mother had driven out the peasant strain of his father's blood. The motherless boy had been brought up in the shadow of the

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

Bank by Mrs. Benders, to whom the Bank was the source of all security and decency in life ; brought up by the side of a father who *was* the Bank ; brought up for the purpose of entering the Bank, which he had done at the earliest possible moment. He was now, at the age of twenty-four, beginning to help his father, whose sight was failing. Thus, except for the slight gentility of his looks, young Mr. Dormer was becoming even more the Bank than his father had always been. With less character than the older man, perhaps it was true that the Bank entered into him even more fully, informed his every thought and action even more completely.

There are strange wayward streaks in the genteelest of young bank clerks. In his twenty-fourth year there fell upon young Mr. Dormer such a thing as the Greeks would have explained as the act of some God. Young Mr. Dormer had no means of explaining what happened to him, no power either, for the thing was all round about and through him, and included him in its sweep. He was in love.

Captain Darcy and Mrs. Blomfield, who had become Mrs. Darcy, remained, from the night of their accidental acclamation on returning from Sir Emery Bird's water party, people of more than usual consequence in Eastwick and in Easthampton. In any case, they would have belonged to the small circle of genteel acquaint-

OUR MR. DORMER

ance that called on each other and were "some one." In any case, they would have been noticed as a fine, handsome couple, living in a very comfortable if not quite gorgeous style. But that moment of public notice gave them a sort of standing with the lower orders ; caps were touched and curtseys bobbed to them more often and more willingly than usual. They had been married in July 1813, and their child, a daughter christened Pleasance, was born in the following April. She was therefore a year younger than young Stephen Dormer, whom she, a demure, fair-haired, blue-eyed, spoiled little thing, in pantalettes and bare shoulders, met from time to time ; he, a serious youth in long trousers and short jackets, with a wave of hair thrown off his forehead and the struggling attempt at a little downward bit of whisker in front of each ear. They met because Our Mr. Dormer, in the dark years following the close of the war, more especially since the death of Joseph Doughty, had become increasingly a personality. Not merely the traders of Easthampton, but far more exalted people had to seek an interview with Our Mr. Dormer, lay their troubles before him, and ask his aid ; which, strictly within the limits of perfect safety and handsome profit for the Bank, was always granted. Among these came to be Mrs. Blomfield, now Mrs. Darcy. Her income came chiefly through tithe and the rent of farms,

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

and when the farmers, during the bad years, made difficulties, she was soon at the end of her small capacity. On the other side of her budget Mrs. Darcy could hope for no reduction of expenses. Darcy, during the twenty years that followed her marriage with him, provided as much disillusionment as a woman of her type is capable of experiencing. Darcy had contracted while on service habits which could not now be broken. Having lived over a quarter of a century in continual danger of death, in camps, barracks or billets that were always temporary and never his own, many times in anxiety of mind or pain of body, under defeat and wounds, he now felt nothing too good for his enjoyment, and no enjoyment complete without the enlivenment of strong drink. He was never tipsy, but continuously, increasingly jocose towards the end, and morose in the beginning, of the days. Kind enough in his brisk soldier's way, he still flattered his wife and spoiled his daughter by his evident admiration—the admiration of a man whose life has been passed without the comfort of a background of domesticated womankind, to whom such women are always attractive. He went his way, therefore, eating, drinking, sleeping and smiling, and teaching little Pleasance to ride ; and when it had to be suggested to him that “really we must do without this,” and “I do not see how we can afford that,” he grew

OUR MR. DORMER

silent, but went without nothing. Hence his lady was at length constrained to consult Our Mr. Dormer.

Our Mr. Dormer, putting on with authority, ease, and the passing of years a quiet assured dignity, proved amply equal to the occasion, was most obliging, most undertaking. Incidentally no one in all England was more capable than he of intimidating the truculent, incompetent farmer, the sporting, resourceless tenant. It had been for years a proverb of the Saturday markets in Castle Ditches, "If Gettin's 'on't meet Owin's, arst Dormer, up-at-t'-bank, t' interjuice 'em !"

So Mr. Dormer brought pressure to bear, and Mrs. Darcy benefited.

Incidentally she asked him to dine, then to take tea on fine summer evenings when the garden was full of fruit ; and being a kind soul, added : "And bring your young gentleman."

Years passed, seemingly resultless. The young gentleman, preoccupied with his future, then with his actual present existence, in the Bank, was not only boyishly shy, but super-boyishly genteel. When visiting the Rectory, when glancing out of the window of the Bank, there was nothing to be told from his looks. And Pleasance, when seated in the French-grey saloon, at backgammon or embroidery, when perched on her grey pony, her royal-blue habit

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

looped, her three-cornered hat set defiantly on her upheld head, what did she think? Was it of young Mr. Dormer? Who shall say? Many people said many things, for Pleasance could hardly help being rather conspicuous in the Easthampton of those days. Darcy, with the passing of years, was becoming more and more a man of two ideas—wine and horses. He was equally an adept with either, but whereas the practice of his devotion to the former kept him seated at his wife's comfortable table, that of the latter took him regularly over the ferry to Overwater, along the London road to the old south gate of Easthampton, down Nether Bargate and along the new Gentlemen's Parade where the shops were, by Prospect Crescent back into Bishopgate, and so by Bishopgate Bridge over the hill by the Quakers' burial-ground, home. He rode any and every horse, and all the neighbourhood was quick enough to get him to ride such as they possessed. For Darcy had graduated in a more than hard school of equitation. He not only taught a horse to obey, he taught it manners. Such good instincts as he had, ran entirely in the direction of horses. And as he passed, chin up, elbow squared, knee and heel faultless in strapped trouser and drooping spur, useless arm across the breast, with Pleasance beside him, people said, "What a fine fellow, what a charming young gentlewoman!" and other

OUR MR. DORMER

people said, "What a damned rogue, spending his wife's money! and what a minx! The shamelessness of her! She should have been married these five years!"

Whatever may have been true of the father, it is much to be doubted if Pleasance really thought of anything except of her personal enjoyment. She had been spoiled as much as so simple and sunny a nature can be. She adored her father, liked riding, and had just enough of that aristocracy, her father's back-stair inheritance, to make her a little disdainful of the usual dutiful early marriage.

So easily passed the time until the summer of 1837, when so much was just budding after the last turgid backwash of the decades of war.

And then :

Well is the Goddess of Love figured as some Eastern Queen ; half fabulous, wholly unaccountable, agelessly old, eternally young, above and beyond all reason.

At a stroke something pierced the very marrow of these two normal, rather good-looking, thoughtless members of the middle classes, pinned them together for ever.

It happened in the well-known walks of the Rectory garden, where Nature, only over the hedge, was always giving the gardener some little trouble to maintain the conventional plan of the place—a garden where they had met a hundred times, and never counted them.

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

Suddenly young Mr. Dormer found himself perspiring, choked with the effort not to seize the soft arm and shoulder beneath the white muslin—and do what with it?—Thought failed him. He set his teeth, clenched his fists. And Pleasance, looking at him, suddenly found her eyes—no, more!—her heart—she would have said, perhaps, her whole being—brimming over with a sweet effusion, a desire that he should be her slave and she his—all mixed and undefinable. Both seemed bathed in—or was it drinking of—a great potation of honey, in which ran streaks of cold, bitter acid that gave a qualm as of the physical sickness that follows sudden fright. As young Mr. Dormer raised his eyes from her neck to her eyes—felt his dragged up, rather—their gaze filled with each other and locked, so that they stumbled over the stone edging of the lawn, clutched each other not to fall, separated as suddenly, and stood apart, a little turned away.

What happened next? Neither had the remotest idea!

Pleasance did not come to herself until she was seated in the window of her room; the broad, low casement with its deep seat, fringed outside with the roses that grew all over the house; one of those windows that seem to have settled down slightly in life and grown good-humoured. It seldom rattled, and its hasps turned easily when it was opened. It looked

OUR MR. DORMER

west, and had been her dreaming-place—yes, and sulking-place, when she had a temper, all her life. She gazed out at the dying orange of the midsummer afterglow, over the woody hill beyond which was Easthampton and—he!—cooling her forehead and neck, feeling with a sort of pleasure her pulse subsiding.

And young Mr. Dormer was seated at the same moment in the great fanlight of the Bank House, half his body outside on the broad sill, his head screwed round, gazing to where, under the deep blue of the eastern heavens, the road rose in a white streak above the chimney-pots that concealed Bishopgate Bridge, and could be seen for a bit disappearing in the trees above Eastwick—where she was.

And both of them were wondering, what is this strange new thing?—turning over again every word, look, feeling, as far as these could be remembered; ending always in “What did I say?” “What has she done?”—a half-timorous hope that the whole thing might prove only a golden dream.

Then, as in all such affairs, there followed the next meeting, with its shy, downcast glance, its sudden chill, its awful disillusion; then the next meeting after that—the grim determination to be alone together and get to some terms with this thing that would not let them rest; and partial success—a quiet corner, box-scented, of the garden, where words and glances were just

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

melting into some fatal embrace, some explosive declaration ; then interrupted by well-meaning, blind, hateful parents, who wanted to be seated at table, or to go home, or some such foolishness. Then the first stiff, timid notes, proffered to a grinning gardener or maidservant with much self-consciousness and bribes of a golden guinea for going ten yards to deliver them without shouting the fact aloud. The uncertain, unsatisfactory replies, the fear—always supposed to be the fear of being found out (though what penalty, transportation or otherwise, the Darceys or Mr. Dormer would be likely to inflict could never have been explained) ; the fear that was really fear of Love itself, with its unknown consequences. Then the disastrous occasion on which Pleasance was out of humour with the weather, or herself, or something, and when a gnat had bitten young Mr. Dormer's nose right at the tip, with comic effect. The cold, not even furtive greeting ; the mutual avoidance ; the casual farewell ; then, to each in his or her own chamber the discovery that in that short week or two, the thing—the Dream—had become so precious, so warm and vital a part of themselves, that it could no longer be forgone. And this very evening was the fine July evening on which Our Mr. Dormer mentioned in his annoying final way that he was going to the bookbinders, and would take a turn back by Prospect Place—inferring as

OUR MR. DORMER

clearly as if he had had it printed in letters four feet high that he expected Stephen to stay in.

And so at almost any other period of his life would Stephen have done. Even three weeks earlier he would have done so with a pleasant sense of responsibility and competence. But not on this night of all nights. He felt it to be supremely important that he should see Pleasance, and decide something—what, he did not picture to himself, but something. But once the great door downstairs had slammed what was he to do?—leave the Bank?—tell Mrs. Benders he must go out—must! But Mrs. Benders held such a position, she would say, “Lawk, Mister Stephen, what for? I’ll get it for you!”

Then came to his aid that serpent whispering in the ear, at whose prompting all the crime and nearly all the heroism in the world have come forth. Crime, in this instance, represented by the reflection: “Benders and the maids will be here, what harm can come?” and heroism by another: “Well, let’s try!”

The golden moments of the sultry evening slipped and slid. Their gentle impact whipped to a frenzy the sensation of something boiling in him. But was it something boiling that prompted him to call the attention of the faithful Mrs. Benders to the worn carpet at the top of the stairs, to watch her call the maids, and with

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

much hammering and pulling and ordering and breathless effort, get it up and rolled and away outside—precisely as he had calculated? Boiling indeed something must have been for what followed; for here was that eminently decent young bank clerk struggling and pushing at a window that had probably not been open for half a century, dropping out of it in his tail-coat and tight trousers, and forgetting his hat, into Middens Alley. Stealing up this, close under the garden wall, over which he could hear Mrs. Benders ordering the maids at their work! Continuing, he turned down Castle Ditches, past the house in which he had been born, reached Riverside, crossed the ha'penny ferry, deserted at that hour, walked, or rather ran, across the meadows to the other ferry opposite Eastwick Church. He stuck his hands in his pockets and whistled as he paced the little landing-stage, to show he did not heed the ferryman's glance at his hatless head.

Never was an evening so clear and still. The lovely twilight hour, most English in its lengthened sweetness, its moderation of heat and light, lingered, unwilling to admit mere darkness to the shapeliness of tree, and still water, and meadow unruffled by breeze. But he heeded not the beauty of the twilight. He hesitated at the Rectory gate, then moved a yard or two up the alley that ran under the garden wall to the back of the summer-house,

OUR MR. DORMER

where, by a little side wicket, the gardener used to wheel out rubbish and wheel in manure. He did so partly to collect his thoughts, partly to get his breath. But instead, his heart began to beat so furiously that he thought they must hear it—they, Pleasance and her father, strolling along the path to the summer-house in the beautiful mild evening air.

At first he felt an unreasonable, bitter pang that any one should walk with her like that ; then a glow of comfort. Darcy was speaking of something—a horse, probably ; she was paying no attention.

They entered the summer-house and sat down. The maid appeared with brandy-and-water for Darcy. What should he do, he, hatless, with dusty knees ? Present himself before the maidservant and demand admission, and be ushered in to Mrs. Darcy ? Or jump over the wall and upset Darcy's brandy-and-water ?

Yet he must do something ; he had got his breath now.

They had grown very quiet. He moved up to the wicket again, pushed it open. The sunset was dying out in deepening colour and shadow. With a skill born of the moment, in one who had had no practice in and no necessity for such antics, he concealed himself among the plants that clustered and crept about the faded, green-painted, crazy trellis-work flanking the

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

summer-house. Peeping through the curtain of leaves, the first thing he saw was Darcy's outstretched leg ; beyond that a white skirt, a little foot in a slipper. Silence ! He tried to see a little more ; something crackled ; he started, made a rustling ; then, with a sudden impatience of all this deception, unaccustomed and irksome, he leapt boldly down and confronted Darcy.

Darcy was sound asleep.

But Pleasance, with what clasping of her hands together, as if to ward off some hand that was closing round the heart in her breast ; with what a soft " Oh ! " that contained little or nothing of surprise, and so much of some other feeling, did she turn and gaze upon her lover, as tiptoeing over the pavement of round pebbles he found a place at her side !

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Mrs. Darcy, formerly Mrs. Blomfield, was a woman in whom an inherent laziness of disposition was confirmed by a lifetime of easy circumstances. This reinforced characteristic helped her over many a might-have-been tragedy, such as a picturesque but selfish husband, or growing difficulty in living as she had been accustomed to live, or fading beauty acting as a foil to the budding beauty of a daughter who showed at least a superficial

OUR MR. DORMER

preference for her father. When left alone, as she often was, to sit in her saloon, she neither wept nor brooded, but thought of other things. It is almost certain that neither Pleasance nor young Mr. Dormer were in her thoughts when the French window was opened from without, and in stepped the two young people. Whatever she felt, surprise or otherwise, was never uttered. Her whole attention was taken by their peculiar behaviour. They both looked very handsome, but so confused ; stood—not really—yes—holding hands, both starting to speak at once, then both stopping and looking at her as if they expected an answer.

At last she made out some formal, almost legal, phrase of the young man's ; it reminded her of the way his father would talk to her about her affairs, when all she wanted was a plain statement of the figure she might spend at the moment. The two children were asking her consent to their marriage. Not very quick-witted, she was searching for some word—some delaying word was her instinct, when in walked Darcy, stiff and sleepy and a trifle captious. And Pleasance rushed forward and buried her face in her mother's neck. That roused her. She commanded her husband :

“ Show young Mr. Dormer out, pray ! ” in kind but unmistakable tones.

Darcy's old-soldier's sense of form constrained him to do as much—bewildered and

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

not quite sure of his senses, as a sleepy sentry salutes. Having touched the bell and opened the saloon door, he stood looking after the maid who was ushering the young man from the house, when he heard the servant :

“ Sir, you ’re going without your hat ! ”

And a mumbled reply : “ It ’s of no consequence.”

Without his hat ! There was no hat in the hall. Nor did the young man turn back. Perplexed, Darcy returned to the candle-lit saloon. His wife and child had left it by the other door. He heard them upstairs.

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The following morning Mr. Dormer sat in the “ parlour ” of the Bank. Before him lay a letter dated “ House of Commons.”

“ DEAR MR. DORMER,—I have received a letter from two persons describing themselves as Trustees of the Friends’ Meeting House, asking for a gift. The names are strange to me, but if they are correct, give them what is right, and debit.—Yours truly,
JNO. DOUGHTY.”

Mr. Dormer was regarding the letter with a mixture of disfavour (because it was evidence of “ Mr. John’s ” growing detachment from Easthampton and the Firm—from all that was good and beautiful in Mr. Dormer’s eyes—and his increasing preoccupation with “ London

OUR MR. DORMER

people" and "Parliament folk") and satisfaction that he, Mr. Dormer, could and would see that everything was "done right." That was becoming a perfect passion with him as age crept on, and often he would be found late at night, in the parlour, solemnly turning over the ledgers, the cash-books, seeing that nothing in the immaculately quill-penned pages had gone astray. He would often use the phrase—an exceptionally abstract one for him: "Keeping things right." He made an entry in a small private ledger headed "Jno. Doughty Esq^{re}," endorsed a memorandum on the letter, and put it in his special waistcoat pocket, moving with a quiet confidence that was more eloquent than volumes.

And in pursuing his narrow line of thought, Mr. Dormer immediately came upon something that was not right. Where was Young Mr. Doughty? For, just as there was a Young Mr. Dormer, so was there a Young Mr. Doughty. Joseph Doughty having died childless, John, absorbed by the cares of this world, had at length despatched his youngest son to represent his uncle in the business at Easthampton, the elder standing in his father's shoes at Seaton. Young John Doughty had been under Our Mr. Dormer's tuition for a year, beginning on the high old desk at the back of the shop, by copying out the letters in longhand, and passing on to the various simple operations of those days;

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

the old stiff-papered ledgers that went on and on until filled up ; the old counter " scroll " laboriously written out by hand, as drafts, notes or coin were solemnly handed to the cashiers by the customers. He showed considerable aptitude, and soon came to sit with Mr. Dormer in the parlour, watching his interviews with the merchants, manufacturers, shopkeepers, farmers.

The boy was usually so diligent, rather flattered at the position into which he was growing. Where was he ?

Mr. Dormer's reflections were interrupted by the knock and entry of his son. Young Mr. Dormer was looking a bit off colour : it might be his excitement of the night before. It might be his state of mind—Love ! Such an abstract proposition naturally did not occur to Our Mr. Dormer. He inclined to the former view, feeling also that it was due from his son to be a little out of sorts as a penalty for his misconduct in leaving the Bank by the side window.

And why was he bringing in a note, and standing there trembling and blushing ? It was the junior's business to bring in notes. It was a promising young cashier's business to be at his counter, exemplifying by his expressionless countenance the absolute impartial integrity of the Institution, of which he was little more than the doorstep.

OUR MR. DORMER

Mr. Dormer meanwhile had opened the note, which ran thus :

“Mrs. Valentine Darcy requests the pleasure of the company of Mr. Stephen Dormer, this evening at six o’clock, to dine, and begs he will excuse the haste of this invitation on the grounds of the urgent matters to be discussed.”

Urgent matters ! The note was marked “Await reply” ; and sure enough here was his son waiting. Raising his eyes, Our Mr. Dormer commanded him, “Go to your place !” in a tone and manner very unaccustomed, for Young Mr. Dormer had an unerring instinct for attending to business.

But this love affair ! No one had ever known the emotions and actions that had led Mr. Dormer to the married state. Whatever they were, they aided him not one whit in dealing with a similar phase in the life of his son, product of his marriage as that son was. However, Mr. Dormer’s sense of reality easily triumphed. Facts were facts. There was this love affair, just as there was Dayborn’s bankruptcy, and the new decision about stamp duty on re-issued notes. And Our Mr. Dormer would deal with such affairs as came in his way. Trust him for that. He wrote his usual bare, frigid acceptance of the invitation and rang the small bell that stood upon the top of the desk that had been Joseph Doughty’s. Then an uncomfortable reflection struck him. He usually received—

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

for years he had received—a double invitation including his son. This time the second name was missing. He could not be surprised. But the son evidently knew the writing and the bearer of the note ; and if left alone while his father went to dine at Eastwick Rectory, what would he do ? Mr. Dormer did not feel sure. Come in through a window without his hat, like a clown in a pantomime ! The fact that such a thing could occur to Mr. Dormer shows how deeply the scene of the night before was telling on his age. He sat considering, and before him the junior clerk, summoned by the bell, stood waiting. And while Mr. Dormer considered, there came a tap at the door, and he found his son again before him, handing him a second note :

“ Young Mr. John’s man is waiting, sir ! ”

Mr. Dormer banished him with a look.

Young Mr. John’s note was brief and painful.

“ . . . regret to be advised by special messenger that my father has a seizure and that his life is despaired of. I am now setting out for London and will write you from there.”

The man of action in Mr. Dormer was stirred. He endorsed and folded the second note, and despatched his answer to the first.

For instead of depressing Our Mr. Dormer, the bad news called up quite the toughest of his immense powers of resistance. Mixed with his reverence of the Doughtys, there was that

OUR MR. DORMER

quality so often present in the old trusted servant, a sort of affectionate contempt. Had his opinion ever been asked, Mr. Dormer might in an expansive moment have confessed that he thought Joseph Doughty with his religion, and John Doughty with his politics, were pursuing windlestraws, and neglecting the one true golden path, that of slow, solid, laborious acquisition. Had any one suggested the idea to him, he would have been curt in his rejection. As the matter was never mentioned, he contented himself with serving the Firm to the very best that was in him. To have the whole weight of the business hung on his shoulders—for now there was no one to confirm a single action of his, the young men at Easthampton and Seaton being yet far too inexperienced to take grave decisions—he felt a mild, steadily rising exhilaration. The staff remarked that never had the “old man,” as they were beginning to call him, been so meticulous in detail, so energetic in action. And when, eventually, he had seen them all out and locked up, he gave a quiet sigh of satisfaction.

He had declined the invitation to dinner. He could not drink with Darcy. Not only did the quantity the latter took incommode him, but his inherited instinct was, of course, for malt liquor. All this grape-juice gave him heartburn. So he pleaded business, with plausibility, since the Bank did not close until

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

the hour at which he was invited. A second note had come from Young John Doughty, announcing his father to be sinking. Mr. Dormer obviously could not absent himself. So he had sent Young Mr. Dormer to represent him, the staff of the Bank, and—incidentally Mr. Dormer had thought that besides getting the boy away from the Darcys', while he heard what they said, a trip to London would shake the lad up and might do him all sorts of good. Thus having side-tracked his son, he changed his office coat for his best black, and taking the hat and stick of his that were known across three counties better than the Crown and Sceptre of the realm, he set out, slowly, in the fine evening, to visit the Darcys.

Having thus, with that mixture of craft and expediency that had made him famous throughout eastern England in such matters as the refusal of undesired overdrafts, and the filtering-out of private-note issues, arranged everything to his liking, Mr. Dormer set off with heart at ease. He did not ride. It would have done violence to all his instincts to have hired a conveyance to go to Eastwick. Yet he was changing ; he felt tired, could not go very fast. On Bishopgate Bridge he stopped and leaned on the stone parapet and gazed down the ample silvery reaches of water that slid away towards Eastwick and on to the sea.

The stones of the old battle-and-traffic-worn

OUR MR. DORMER

parapet were warm to the touch. That simple fact called up memories to which Mr. Dormer never alluded publicly, and to which he seldom referred in his most inmost thoughts. It was to one of those tumble-down cottages beside the bridge, under the wall of the Close, that his father had come, a village artisan, migrating to the political freedom, the great opportunity, of the town. It was here, on the old bridge, that Mr. Dormer had played when, as he put it to himself, "I was a little dirty-nosed rascal of a boy." He had been sent to the Friends' First Day School, had made acquaintance with the Doughtys, then mere merchants' sons, and not socially distinguished in that ultra-democratic atmosphere. The *protégé* of Joseph, the companion of John, he had clung on and risen with them—a shade harder in texture, less a man of ideas than they ; and here he was. He and Joseph had married the two Miss Aldens. It was so long ago and so hazy—for nothing fades from Our Mr. Dormers so easily as the transient bloom of sentiment, the gusty glow of passion—it seemed very unreal.

And now his son ! *He* wanted to get married. And here Mr. Dormer's stiff-jointed imagination failed him. His mind wandered from such unrealities to something more real. Here was John Doughty a-dying. Mr. Dormer's mind had been formed long before the sentimental gush of the great peace era of the nine-

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

teenth century. He was a realist in his own fashion. He knew he would never see John Doughty again. Nor did he shrink from the fact. How many accounts had he not ruled off in the ledgers and last cheques returned "Drawer deceased"? People did die. It was incontrovertible. Half of Mr. Dormer's seventy-four years had been those during which England was at war, generally with nearly all the world; and he knew life for the hard, abruptly-ending thing it was. And one day he, Mr. Dormer, of Doughtys' Bank, would die too. He was acquiescent enough about himself. But the Bank would not die. The Bank was new, true and beautiful. All that Mr. Dormer had left on one side, had disregarded, ignored, never imagined, was summed up in the Bank. It was his religion, his art, his science of life. He had seen it rise, together with its kindred institutions: Hoppers' in Lombard Street, Lloyds' at Birmingham, Parr's at Manchester, Pease's in the far North: Quaker learning, Quaker integrity, Quaker justice mobilised into daily business. He had worked at it, lived in it, nursed it through the bad years 1825-1831, how many more—he *was* it. Well might a weary old man be willing to die, when all that he loved best in the world was to go on, flourishing, growing like some beautiful tree.

Mr. Dormer had heard them read from the Bible about the rain falling on the just and on the

OUR MR. DORMER

unjust, but he knew better. The rain that fell on the just was a golden rain ; the rain that fell on the unjust was called, in plain English, Bankruptcy.

Mr. Dormer's power of reflection, never very strong, petered out. His eye had caught on a spot of bright colour, down there along Riverside, between the ferry under its poplars and the foundry (in the Easthampton of those days there was only one Foundry, and everybody knew where it was and called it " the " Foundry). Oh yes, he remembered ; they were making a railway line for this new steam locomotion. Always " modern " and progressive, Mr. Dormer highly approved. He could not see much use in it for passenger traffic ; it was uncomfortable, even dangerous, and very little quicker than the new coaches ; but for goods—it was going to be a great thing, he felt sure ; and the new scheme of postage stamps they were talking about, at the cheap rate !

Mr. Dormer turned abruptly and stumped off the bridge and up the hill. The bridge represented the past, with its archaic stones that had witnessed his humble beginnings. Mr. Dormer was one of those who went on.

And as he went he noticed that new house of Saint's—the first house to be built on the eastern bank of the river ; a stucco-fronted, castellated affair, with long windows in the corners of which were squares of coloured glass,

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

red and purple, orange and green. Not that Mr. Dormer had any æsthetic conscience about such things, but that he considered Saint unbusinesslike. One made money by living over one's business, and working hard and "keeping things right"; and then one made more money—and then more than that. But what use was it to a haberdasher—and every one in East-hampton knew that Saint had served his own shop from behind its broad counter—to go living outside the town in a—what?—a villa, they called it; he couldn't see. Saint was a fool.

The hill seemed to have grown very steep. At the top Mr. Dormer gave "Good evening" to the porter of the burial-ground, who was doing up a flower-bed in front of his little twin house. Mr. Dormer saw nothing peculiar in a man and wife and six children living in two rooms, with a fourteen-foot carriage gate between. On the contrary, he regarded the man as lucky. The trustees were lenient masters, and so long as the old family squares of graves were neat, the job must be an easy one. No, Mr. Dormer's thoughts were upon another subject. As he leaned on the mellow old wall, under the trees that were getting up so nicely, he was thinking of his wife's grave, and mechanically raised the brim of his hat an inch or so. The gesture had the oddest effect when he made it, like a grain of some foreign substance in his composition. It was, of course, a survival of

quite another England, of which Mr. Dormer, the modern man of 1837, had never heard—an England full of long-settled authority and well-worn rules of life, with an image at every street corner that had a definite concrete significance, acknowledged by a gesture. And so deep had the habit worn, that three hundred years after it had all been swept away, Mr. Dormer still made a gesture, as if crossing himself. That was all. Of his wife, their life together, her death, no sign—nothing. It was all in the past. For the time, surely not long ahead, when he must come and lie beside her, acquiescence and a faint incredulity. He wiped his forehead, resettled his hat, and went on his way down the long hill toward the riverside greenery and church tower of Eastwick, beneath which nestled the Rectory.

It was cooler than it had been the previous evening, and the family were indoors. That is to say, there were three people sitting by candle-light, when Mr. Dormer made his bow, and after some careful peering, as his old eyes got used to the visibility of the long, soft-coloured room, he made them out to be Darcy, sitting back in his chair with his legs stuck out (as a gentleman had perforce to do in tight-strapped trousers), Mrs. Darcy, who had risen to receive him, and a young man he did not know—oh, yes! it must be young Jack Blomfield, Mrs. Darcy's son by her first husband the Rector.

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

Mrs. Darcy begged him to be seated by the little inlaid table, and placed a glass of wine at his elbow, from which he took a sip from time to time because it belonged to the new station in life to which he had called himself, not because he liked it, preferring beer. Mrs. Darcy then said, in a fluttering manner, that she supposed he had heard what the young people desired. She spoke like this because her comfortable acquiescence in everything had been rudely shaken by Darcy. When the projected engagement had been explained to him, he had made a scene unequalled, perhaps, in their married life, and Mrs. Darcy, at fifty-five, had neither the confidence in herself—that had been sapped by long neglect—nor any other quality that enabled her to stand against it. At the same time, she had been called upon to consider her son Jack's affairs. He had obtained a Commission in the Army, partly by her husband's influence, partly by that of Sir Emery Bird, in the early days of her marriage. Young Jack Blomfield had fallen on evil days. Just too late to share in the glory of Waterloo, his career had fallen in the era of comparative peace that succeeded, in which a soldier's expenses were at their heaviest, living in, or near barracks, and taking his share of the social life of this or that garrison town. On the other hand, there was no campaigning, with its enforced saving of private pockets and its quick, lucrative

OUR MR. DORMER

promotion. Well on in his thirties, disgusted, getting depraved in every sense, he was beginning all the bad and slack traditions of the Regular Army. Twice Mrs. Darcy had paid his debts. Now he was again in debt, but showed a little resolution ; had said definitely that he would send in his papers and take some civilian employment. This had occasioned a scene with Captain Darcy, who said that boys had no spirit ; what did the lad want to pay the d——d tradesmen for ? Subalterns were different in his day. But the guilt was off this idol. Jack Blomfield, his father's son and good at heart, had seen through his stepfather, as he had seen through the "glories" of military life. He persisted. When it was represented to Darcy that the family financial situation would be eased, that Pleasance could have a new habit, and he could have his saddler's bill paid—for he had been denied further credit by the fellow—he consented surlily. Then came Pleasance's love affair, and Mrs. Darcy, with the groping compromise of a spoiled, lazy nature, felt she could use Pleasance as a lever. To do her justice, she would not have thought of it, had not Darcy been so furious at the bare mention of young Mr. Dormer's proposal. He said in unmeasured terms what he thought of Our Mr. Dormer, young Mr. Dormer, and the "whole tailor's-shop-full of d——d cross-legged counter-jumpers." But Captain Darcy must

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

not be too hardly judged. He was hurt to the quick that a fresh and pretty soul, who happened to be his daughter, whom he idolised and who idolised—or had idolised—him, should seem to prefer another. At an age when only platonic affection was open to him, he indulged in it more deeply than he ever had in the passing sensualities of youth and middle-age. It took a long course of argument to prove to him how impossible it was for Pleasance to marry into the set into which, he now said, he expected her to go. For he, and a few hundred others, had been hailed in many a Spanish town as Saviours, and he secretly regarded himself as a person for whom nothing was too good, and to whom society at large owed a debt. He did not think this. He felt it.

At length the prospect of having his bills paid constrained him to ill-humoured consent. When Our Mr. Dormer entered the room, therefore, he gave him a salute, cheery for the occasion, and poured out his glass of wine.

Our Mr. Dormer had on his best interview manner. He used it only when doling out or refusing loans to the "County." Fairly acute when set in this attitude, he soon took in Mrs. Darcy's hesitating, unconfident sentences. She was using the girl as a decoy to get her son established in life. Did Mr. Dormer blame her? Certainly not. It was business. He sympathised with it, and felt it easier than usual

OUR MR. DORMER

to repress his instinct to address Mrs. Darcy as "my good woman."

But he did not stop at sympathy. He looked at the matter from the Bank's point of view. The prospect was favourable. In fact, it was like so many prospects opening up in the England of 1837, pleasant, remunerative, and providing a cheap and profitable means of doing what was kind and generous. Have young Blomfield in the Bank?—Why, certainly! and more like him, if possible. They could be taught their work, would naturally be trustworthy, being dependent on the Bank and too well known in the town to risk behaving badly. They could raise the tone of the business, give it prestige. And the price? The girl was pretty and engaging. She might be extravagant, but young Stephen would see to that. He had trained the boy carefully, with one clearly defined object in view, the filling of his father's shoes when the time should come. Our Mr. Dormer was, in his mild way, ambitious. The young girl (as he called Pleasance) would do credit to the position, and be a fine mistress of the Bank House.

Quietly, then, with his habitual business reserve, speaking slowly and evenly through Mrs. Darcy's anxious exclamations, hurried suggestions and expostulations, all intended to cloak and render decent what was going on, and failing completely, he signified his assent

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

to the double proposition. He would be happy to arrange for the young gentleman to enter the Bank. He should place no obstacle in the way of the proposed marriage.

Darcy grunted and shifted his left leg, which had been resting on his right, so that his right now rested on it. Mrs. Darcy began her thanks almost tearfully ; Jack Blomfield began his with a thin layer of politeness over a general hopelessness.

Mr. Dormer, seeing nothing further to stay for, took his leave. Neither of the three made more than a perfunctory attempt to detain him, but he did not notice. Nor did he notice, ushered through the lamplit hall on his way out, a dim, pale figure in a chamber-gown, crouching behind the great solid newel-post of the stairs, the shallow, dark old stairs that turned in their leisurely way, a few inches at a step, up out of the width of the hall into the spaciousness of the first floor "landing"—a figure that peered at his face, and must have got precious little satisfaction from that wooden effigy. But even Mr. Dormer could not help noticing something—how shall it be described?—sweet in the hall, as he passed through. To him, no doubt, it was bound up with the gradual consolidation of his final position in this world—progress and prosperity for the Bank, an advantageous marriage for his son ; but it was beyond him to suppose that a young

OUR MR. DORMER

girl's hopes and blessings could affect such solid realities.

It was late, almost quite dark, and Mr. Dormer kept well in the middle of the road, for his sight was quite useless to him in such a light. However, he climbed the deserted hill (for in those days it had to be something special that took folk beyond the walls of the town). At the top of the hill, passing the graveyard, it was better. There was still a lemon-coloured streak in the west. Mr. Dormer looked neither at it nor at the graveyard. Beauty meant about as much to him as superstition. They were both things he had early decided he could not afford. Now he simply did not notice them, but went on, down the hill, over the bridge, up the street. Besides, he was thinking—gloating a little in his mild way. He must have been getting sleepy, he certainly was getting old and rather blind. Yet there was surely some irony in the fact that, rounding the corner of the Bank, he stumbled and fell on the kerb of the new pavement. He, the modern, progressive Mr. Dormer, who had done more than any other single man to foster and increase the industry and commerce of the town, fell over its latest, most characteristic improvement. The old cobbles had been a danger to the ankle, a torture to the toe. They harboured the filth of centuries, and were giving way beneath the increased traffic. The Vestry had ordered their

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

removal, the new "Corporation" had carried it out. The sharp edge of the new stones met Mr. Dormer's shin fairly in the middle.

Letting himself in, he dismissed Swan, whom he had told to watch the premises until his return. Swan, who had never forgiven him his advancement, grunted surlily, and stumped off.

Satisfying himself that all was in order, he mounted the old stairs, under the plaster baby Jove astride the plaster eagle. And a great black Mr. Dormer, a shadow Mr. Dormer, monstrous on the walls, mounted too.

Faint sounds came from the attic floor, where the maids were going to bed, and Mr. Dormer stopped and turned his head toward the short flight of stairs leading to that part of the house, as though he resented that tardy merriment in the Bank House, as a verger might in a church. But when his footsteps stopped, the soft, distant giggling and chattering stopped too, as though the happiness of those healthy, simple country-bred girls was also a shadow, dodging behind Mr. Dormer's back, but ceasing to be when he turned to face it.

There fell silence that befitted the place and the time, the silence of the sleep-time of a house where hard, responsible work was carried out in a dignified manner, and folk took their rest seriously, as if it were a part of their duty.

Mr. Dormer entered his bedroom, put down

OUR MR. DORMER

his candle and undressed. The room was almost august in its bareness. Heavy curtains, old rose in colour, completely covered the two windows that looked out over the garden, so that no breath of the sweetness of the summer morning could find its way in until Mr. Dormer permitted it. Between the windows was a diminutive washstand in mahogany and rose-wood, very stained and worn ; for Mr. Dormer's ablutions, beyond a careful shave with long-pointed razors, were no more extensive than the times demanded, and were carried out facing a little square glass upon the wall.

The high fireplace, with a tiny grate between wide hobs, the whole overshadowed by a huge wood and plaster overmantel, supported by pillars, and decorated with a carved panel of a shepherd piping to his flock, filled the eastern wall. Each side of it stood a high-backed wooden chair, innocent of all upholstery. There was nothing else on this side of the room. The fireplace was, of course, in place before the Doughtys bought the house, and long before Joseph Doughty used the room. He probably thought it luxurious. Mr. Dormer simply did not think about it. He stood his police-rattle and dark lantern on it, believing that all things, like all men, had their uses.

Opposite to the fireplace, next to the door, was a high, bow-fronted, splay-footed chest of drawers, whose overhanging top, an inch thick,

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

and ebony knobs with bone centres, spoke of the pride of some village carpenter who had put it together. Mr. Dormer never opened it. All his life he had had, first, his wife, and ever since, Mrs. Benders, to lay out his clothes week by week, and week by week fold up and put away those that had been washed. It was women's work, he thought, if he ever thought about it. And any woman might have been proud of the contents, their condition and their meticulous order.

Above this article of furniture hung one of those miracles of worsted-work upon canvas, framed in gilt, depicting an angular juvenile female figure holding an open book toward a parrot on a perch, the whole surrounded by floral sprays such as can only exist in a better world, while beneath was the legend :

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

"Lord, while the fruitful hour I spend
Teach me to trust Thee to the end."

Susan Alden. 5 February 1785.

But the main piece of furniture of the room was the bed. When made, it took a good fifty square feet of floor-space, over seven each way. The top of its curtain-rails were six feet from the floor, and the level at which the occupant lay rose to over half that height. The side toward

OUR MR. DORMER

the chest of drawers was smooth, unturned, never used. Mr. Dormer slept well on the fireplace side, and next to him stood a solid simple night-table, that bore a tinder-box, candle and snuffers in a tray so old and black that none could now determine its original colour, though Mr. Dormer's insistent modernity had introduced a box of matches. Beside the tray, on the top of the night-table, smooth and reflecting as a pool of water, Mr. Dormer laid his thick, heavy old watch, whose dial was so plain that the night must have been dark that hid its figuring, and the noise of wind or rain terrific that could drown its stentorian tick.

There might have been something pathetic about the lonely old man's candle-lit bedside preparations, had he not so obviously been quite content with things as they were. Standing a moment in his short, old-fashioned shirt and nightcap, whose tassel fell over his ear, he caressed a moment his battered shin, blew out the light and climbed into bed. He lay on his back a moment, listening.

Ah ! there it was : the opening stroke of the bells of the Cathedral, chiming the four-line verse that betokened the hour. Mr. Dormer was not sentimental about such things. He approved of them because they were one of the permanent, unwavering witnesses of a lifetime of order.

The chimes ceased ; there came the pause

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

and the ten strokes, full and regular. Still Mr. Dormer listened. Then, in the countrified quiet of the old town, there rose a faint sound, regular, pulsing, eventually developing into the syncopated clip-clop of a heavy, lame man, walking with a stoutly-shod stick on the stones. It was the night-watchman, Whalebelly, going his round, from a sort of dog-kennel within the railings that flanked the portico of the front door and guarded the windows of the shop from immediate assault, along Middens Alley, past the Lodge, along the path that skirted Castle Ditches, until he turned by the ropewalk into Riverside Alley, that led him back under Mr. Dormer's bedroom wall ; here he halted, and there rose in the night his voice, so rich in malt and hops (with more than a suspicion of rum in it) that the wags of the town said it didn't surprise them, Doughtys' having a lame watchman, for he couldn't run away if attacked, while his halloing would wake the dead :

" 'Ten o'clock, and a-all 's we-ell ! " floated up the familiar cry.

With this assurance Mr. Dormer turned over and went to sleep.

He woke as usual at six, and lay a moment staring at the motes whirling in the bright shafts of sunlight that struggled through chinks in the curtains. He sat up, swung out his legs and began to dress himself from the pile of his clothes that lay on the foot of the bed. It was

OUR MR. DORMER

not until he wanted to brace up his breeches and lowered himself to the floor, that he became aware of a pain in the shin that made him gasp. The place where he had knocked it the previous evening was swollen and discoloured. In his annoyance he limped, in shirt-sleeves and unshaven, out to the foot of the attic stairs. Not a sound. He raised his voice, surprisingly resonant for the wizened old body he appeared, and called with that countrified phrase and tone that still clung to him on such occasions :

“ Rouse ye, rouse ye ; past six o'clock ! ” and waited until he heard the creaking of straw mattresses, the half-wakened yawn, the grudging “ Yes, sir, we ’re coming ! ” as the drowsy girls drew their knees up to their chins, levered themselves upright and blinked unwillingly at the daylight.

While he shaved, the pain in his leg grew so bad that he had to rest it on a chair. But once downstairs, asking Whalebelly of the weather, as that hoarse, dishevelled person took down the shutters, and watching that the hired woman who perfunctorily cleaned small portions of the Bank did not touch anything in the Parlour, he forgot it.

He remembered it again at intervals during the day, as his duties permitted. All the evening he rested it on a chair. That night he had Mrs. Benders poultice it.

A week later he still remembered it as he sat

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

down to breakfast, but it was soon banished from his head. A second place had been set, the one that his son usually occupied, when young Stephen appeared.

Mr. Dormer, gazing at him under an up-lifted hand—for the morning sun was pouring across the old round, centre-leg dining-table in a broad golden stream—waited for the account of the funeral that he knew his son would regard as due to him. They understood each other extremely well. Probably because of this Mr. Dormer failed utterly to imagine what had happened. He knew Stephen. He had never met Stephen in love.

The first words had to be repeated before he took them in. Stephen was blushing and looking down.

“Thank you for the steps you have taken with the Darcys.”

“How do you know what steps I have taken?” Mr. Dormer liked to keep the reins in his own hands.

“Pleasance told me.”

Mr. Dormer forbore to say, “When did you see her?” knowing his son to have come off the night mail a little over an hour before. Perhaps it was as well, for that son went on :

“In fact, she wished to say so herself !”

What happened next was quite beyond Mr. Dormer’s power of expression—almost beyond appreciation. But as he sat in his chair, half

OUR MR. DORMER

blinded with the lovely warmth of the sun, bewildered by the unexpected turn of the conversation, he suddenly became conscious of a flash of white and gold round the table to where he sat, a whiff of roses, soft hands round his neck, and a cheek against his. Before he could recover himself, Pleasance was standing beside Stephen, holding his hand and looking up into his face.

And Mr. Dormer did a thing he had not done all his life—entertained a lady to breakfast—without a previous invitation, too. Mrs. Benders was rung for, and with a great commotion and “la-ing” and “lawking,” set another place. The sun shone, the urn hissed, the bacon and eggs and mushrooms and muffins steamed. Mr. Dormer did not know what to say, searched in vain for any precedent, found nothing and said nothing, but, stranger than all, kept on smiling. Stephen smiled too, and spoke little. He was bemused. Having travelled all night and gone straight to Eastwick, and all the emotion it meant, without breakfast, he was now in a state of mild intoxication.

And Pleasance said little. She was, in her quiet way, triumphing. Though generous and sensible enough, she was inherently lazy-minded and utterly spoiled. She had written Stephen of Mr. Dormer’s visit and its result, and that she was always out in the garden by seven. Of course he came. She insisted on

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

going at once to his father, sure that she would make him, the stern, unapproachable Mr. Dormer, into a friend, then an ally, finally a slave. Stephen was in no state to resist. Hand in hand in the glorious early morning they had crossed Eastwick ferry, threaded the meadows, crossed the Riverside ferry, and walked up by Castle Ditches to the Bank. She knew that such a thing was not proper. She knew Stephen and his father thought so. That she made them accept it was the beginning of her success. She had formed her plan. She would be mistress of the Bank House. How right her instinct was, the next half-century was to show.

So she sat demurely smiling, first at Stephen, then at his father, until the latter suddenly leapt up : " Good God, nine o'clock ! " and subsided as fast, on account of his leg.

She took her leave. Her mother greeted her on her return with mild reproof, her father with sulks that melted to pathetic adoration. But she heeded neither. She was sure of herself now.

Stephen and Pleasance were married in the autumn. Mr. Dormer was obliged to drive to the church, and had Whalebelly to help him to his place. Young Mr. John attended ; solid business friends of Mr. Dormer's, penurious, reformed-rake friends of Darcy's. The County was there, the city was there. It was the most brilliant ceremony of a decade.

OUR MR. DORMER

After a short honeymoon, the happy pair came to occupy the front state-bedroom of the old House. Mr. Dormer's growing infirmity had necessitated Stephen's formal appointment as assistant chief clerk. Never were a young man's prospects more brilliant ; never was a young man less spoiled by success. He seemed to have inherited all his father's instinct for business, plus the latter's seventy years' training and knowledge, and less a certain crude manner due to his village origin. Within a twelve-month it became known that a new power had arisen in Doughtys' Bank. And just before Quarter Day, or at those crucial moments, Easter and Michaelmas, or, indeed, on any busy Saturday of the year, silk-throwsters and iron-founders and brewers and butchers, farmers and wharfingers, with a sprinkling of gentry, solicitors and doctors, would come, if they had money to invest, or to borrow, and ask quietly for young Mr. Dormer.

Then Stephen, very dapper as to the legs, and, in spite of stock and high collar, rather undeveloped-looking in the chest and shoulder, clean-shaven all but a bit of whisker before the ear, with a fine wave of hair thrown off the brow, and a young, smooth, candid, good-natured face, in which an occasional gleam of light blue eye, or folded closeness at the corner of the lip, would alone betray the essential Dormer, would pass out of the little wicket in

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

the counter and hold a short, whispered conversation with the applicant, getting him into form, as it were, cutting away verbiage, sentiment, inexactitude. When this process was sufficiently advanced, Stephen would step back to the wicket, hold it open with a courtly bow (which his slim figure and sloping shoulders rendered easy and effective, but which, nevertheless, he had assiduously practised during his courtship) and usher the applicant for higher interest or a wider margin of overdraft into the enclosure where the clerks bent over their books. Preceding him again, Stephen next knocked thrice at the door of the Parlour, and was admitted, with his applicant. The door was closed, and Stephen stood deferentially, not with his back against it, but ready to assume such an attitude if required. He then briefly introduced the applicant, keeping the latter strictly to the Revised Version of what he required.

The person in question found himself in a room of a certain airlessness, every article of which showed unostentatious solid permanence, faced by a rather gawky young man, who he learned, if he did not know, was Young Mr. John Doughty, and by what he probably regarded as rather a dreadful old one, Our Mr. Dormer, who now used a chair with a leg rest. Young Mr. Doughty rose and motioned to a chair. Our Mr. Dormer scrawled something

OUR MR. DORMER

on a bit of paper and passed it to Young Mr. Doughty, who obviously based his reply upon it; while Stephen in the background shepherded every word that fell from the applicant's lips. Is it to be wondered at, that most applicants accepted three per cent. where they wanted five, or promised to deposit £600 security for a £300 overdraft, when they had meant to deposit £300 against accommodation of £600.

And if Stephen was successful in his business capacity, how much more so was he in private life. It had never been realised in Easthampton, at least not in the memory of man, how well situated the Bank House was from the social point of view. Under the somewhat severe reign of Joseph Doughty, no one had ever been invited there except relatives, the poor and needy, or members of the Society of Friends. Under Mr. Dormer's lonely widowhood even those meagre social activities had ceased.

Stephen started fresh with two of the greatest advantages for such a task, a spoiled wife, and a father becoming wealthy, who doted on her, as much as Mr. Dormer had ever been known to dote on any one. And when Pleasance said, with her own special air, "I am thinking of making the blue bedroom into a drawing-room, I've nowhere to ask any one!" Stephen, adoring, looked across at his father, who smiled a Dormerish smile, and nodded very slightly.

Father and son knew each other's income to

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

a penny. When the bill came in, Mr. Dormer took it from Stephen, gently but firmly, and paid it. It was over forty pounds. The fact got abroad, not through the Dormers, we may be sure, but through Miles, the upholsterer, who had provided the magenta paint, flowered wallpaper, the gilt brackets, the curly over-decorated chairs and settees. It was generally considered to do the Dormers great credit. The fact that it was really a bedroom (the original drawing-room must have been on the ground floor, in the space occupied by the banking office or "shop") and that you went up twenty-two stairs to it, did not detract from its advantages. The stairs were handsome, the room itself lofty and well-appointed, with four windows, two looking on to Bishopgate, where everybody of importance lived, between the Market Place and the gate of the Close, and two looking on to Prospect Place, increasingly in demand as a residential street, since Saint had built that little row of four houses, looking out behind upon Castle Ditches, and called them The Grove. It was in one or other of these windows that Pleasance would sit, looking more than ever like a youthful queen.

And queenly she was ; much the build and weight of the young Queen Victoria, less profile but more of her, a humbler position but just as simple, single-minded and imperious. And she had yet more advantages.

OUR MR. DORMER

Mr. Dormer had been brought up in, and owed his worldly success to, a dumb but persistent membership of the Congregation of Friends in Dog Lane. It goes without saying that he brought up Stephen to follow in his footsteps. But the most docile and tractable son cannot set his feet exactly in his father's footsteps, being, as is often not admitted by the elder generation, a different person. Stephen had none of the crudity the elder Mr. Dormer had brought from the village. When that simple, child-like Christian, Samson Pear, passed on one of his tours by the old Meeting House, Stephen saw that pale, glowing face, those thin, refined features, uplifted in the downward, tree-shaded light of the old oval skylights, heard that quiet, rather monotonous voice, felt that gentle assumption of all men being close and affectionate brothers—he, the young Stephen, was completely captivated. He volunteered at once as a teacher in the First Day School, received the clasp of that thin, pleasant hand, and carried with him to his grave a memory of which few now can understand the fragrance. Nor did Stephen realise that the meagre, prayer-and-text-punctuated, reading, writing and arithmetic education that the poorer classes received from him and his fellows was the first flush of the solvent that washed away the class barriers of England.

Pleasance, brought up in an atmosphere that,

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

so far as her mother was concerned, was still semi-rectory, saw nothing that she objected to in this. On the contrary, it was bound up in that basic respectability that was so comforting a quality about Stephen. But she took an early opportunity of pointing out that she had been brought up in the Church of England, and that, if Stephen wished to attend the Friends' Meeting House, he might escort her, in the afternoon, to the Cathedral.

It further happened that the Dean of Easthampton, at the moment, was an old friend of her mother's first husband, and had known Mrs. Blomfield. He called, as Deans did in those days. The Colonel of the garrison, one of her father's old comrades, whom advancing years and poverty were just reducing to a reasonable sobriety, was in want of money. Arriving after the Bank was closed, he had been shown upstairs to see young Mr. Stephen. He was received by Pleasance, whom he had met at Eastwick the previous Sunday (Darcy had, of course, introduced her as "Mrs. Dormer" and omitted to explain that she was the wife of the chief clerk of Doughtys' Bank). The Colonel was so pleased with her, and with the style of her drawing-room, that he called again, and even offered to find her a mount for hunting.

How all this might have affected the quiet happiness of Stephen's home will never be known, for opportunely Pleasance was prevented

OUR MR. DORMER

from becoming the idol of a garrison mess by the fact that, as the autumn wore into winter, it became obvious that she and Stephen were founding a family. This news was received by Stephen with a certain excitement, by Our Mr. Dormer with a quiet satisfaction. The latter was now almost completely chair-ridden. The doctor, after sounding the old man, shook his head and told Stephen something that Stephen, tears in his eyes, did not repeat.

About that time there was living—existing, rather—in Easthampton a “furriner,” as the natives said, of the name of Jean Wagemann. He gave out that he was a gentleman from Luxemburg, who had lost all his properties in the wars. However this may have been, he was obviously half-fed, middle-aged, lived over the midwife’s at the corner of Priory Loke in Dog Lane, where he hung out an emblazoned board describing himself as an artist and portrait painter. This brought him some business from the Brewery that occupied the old Priory Buildings. But breweries only re-paint a certain number of signs at a time, and with winter coming on, “Mountseer” Wagemann, as he was called in that populous rather than select neighbourhood, found himself faced with starvation.

How wayward are the flickerings of those little flames of courage that burn perpetually, even in the breasts of “furriners”! Wagemann

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

made the acquaintance, in the Briton's Arms, of a bibulous clerk to Forster, the great East-hampton lawyer, named Fawne. Fawne fancied himself an artist with the pen, and from engrossing deeds actually got to putting little faces in the initial letters of notices of sweepstakes, cock-fights and wardrobes to sell that hung in the bar of the Briton's Arms. One night in his cups he challenged Wagemann to paint portraits. In a sobered mood he owned that it was beyond him, but Wagemann produced and exhibited a striking pencil portrait of him, Fawne, and the authorities of the bar parlour adjudged the Luxemburger the winner of the bet. The stake he spent with a small printer in getting out handbills (drawn up by Fawne) describing him as "Professor" and prepared "to give lessons in drawing and painting from life and in the art of portraiture." Armed with these, he began to call at all the houses in Bishopgate, Prospect Crescent, and the Close. Among others, he called at the Bank House. Stephen saw him. Pleasance was slightly indisposed and was breakfasting in her room. Stephen, already rather on tenterhooks about her, thought it a good idea to suggest that the foreigner should make a portrait of her. He was not impressed by M. Wagemann. He knew, by all the canons of a budding bank manager, that foreigners in tight, knee-baggy trousers, buttoned-up tail-coats, frayed at the edges, who

OUR MR. DORMER

carried an extraordinary peaked cap in their hands, and bowed from the waist, were "no good." But his heart was kind, and he thought it might please his wife, among whose graces was a slight knowledge of the French and Italian tongues, both of which M. Wagemann professed to speak.

So a head and shoulders of Pleasance was begun. M. Wagemann blossomed, under the influence of the regular work, the recommendation which it was to work at the Bank House ; partly also through association with Pleasance, whom everybody loved.

It was under these circumstances that Our Mr. Dormer saw him, and fixed him with a basilisk eye. What the old man's real feelings were will never be known ; not exactly suspicion, nor active mistrust, so much as a sense that these persons must be glared at in order to get the best out of them. And the best was forthcoming. In its wide-slipped, gilt oval frame the head and shoulders of Pleasance, " tinted " with M. Wagemann's most dexterous care, if not a speaking likeness, was pleasant to look at.

But when, this effort being finished, Pleasance, in her turn, suggested, with her musical laugh, that she would like a portrait of Mr. Dormer, then did Wagemann really surpass himself. It cannot now be discovered to what obscure motive—vanity, affection for his daughter-in-law, desire to hold this foreigner still longer

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

under his Britannic gaze—Mr. Dormer's acquiescence is to be attributed. Certain it is that every afternoon, after lunch, he sat for half an hour in the drawing-room, while the artist, arriving punctually and rigging up his impedimenta every day afresh, worked upon a full-length oil portrait. And such was the effect of Mr. Dormer's stern, unblinking stare, that this work promised to be, and finally was, even better than the slighter, more charming one of Pleasance.

There was something fatally opportune about it. Alas ! every week the sittings became longer, as Our Mr. Dormer became less and less capable of being helped by his son and Whalebelly down into the Bank.

Spring came—spring in Easthampton of the 'thirties—with the high, wide windows of the old rooms open to the scent of the fields ; with the song and flight of birds in the clear sky, across gardens, old roofs and towers. The portrait was finished, so was Our Mr. Dormer. He, who might for hardened regularity have outlived a century, was laid low by a chance blow on the shin, which, bringing on a growth in the bone, put an end to his endless activity, and so to the iron health of Our Mr. Dormer. First the weekly visits to Eastwick Rectory had to be discontinued. He could not bear the jolting of the chaise. Then he found his day's work, even seated, too much. It left him

OUR MR. DORMER

feverish, sleepless. He was reduced to an hour in the morning, when, on a sofa in the Parlour, he solemnly opened the letters, putting them in a pile to his left, the envelopes in a pile to his right. When he had finished, Stephen came, was given a few directions—for nothing in the previous sixty-two years of the commercial history of Easthampton had ever passed from the old man's mind—and then there was the business of being helped upstairs, of having a word with Pleasance, of sitting to the foreigner.

The day came when the portrait was finished. M. Wagemann signalled the occasion by purchasing and using some pomatum, and what Mrs. Benders described in the kitchen as "lotion for the throat" (with a leer and a wink). Smelling of both, smiling and bowing, he produced the work, duly framed, and received from Stephen the assurance that he would forthwith be paid the stipulated ten guineas. He thought himself well off, for the fact of being employed at the Bank, which had gone the round of polite Easthampton, then very much the country town, was worth in advertisement many times ten guineas. He turned to Mr. Dormer with a vague idea, born of gratitude and throat lotion, of expanding his thanks. Mr. Dormer waved him majestically aside. Stephen led him down into the hall, and went to his special desk next the Parlour door to draw the cheque. When this was handed to M. Wagemann, the latter

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

seized Stephen round the neck and kissed him on either cheek, with guttural sounds as of a grateful cat. Stephen thrust him out of the door and laughed, and told Pleasance all about it, like the grown-up boy he was ; and Pleasance laughed too.

Meantime, left by himself, for an hour the old man outstared this new presentation of himself. Pleasance was upstairs. There was no one to disturb him.

No one who has seen it will doubt that it is far and away the best thing Wagemann ever did, quite beyond his usual scope, a very fair portrait. He had been kept so under Mr. Dormer's eye, that something of the old man's intense concentration of character had, as it were, driven the brush along the canvas. The drab clothes, the quiet background (a desk and some ledgers), but most of all the pallid flesh, dominated by the puckered eyes and mouth, were Our Mr. Dormer to the life.

What the old man gained by that silent interview with himself is unknown. What the picture gained is equally unknown, because it rests upon the evidence of Mrs. Benders and the "gals," as they were just beginning to call themselves, in place of "maids in service." All those inhabitants of the kitchen, now five in all, vowed that the portrait gave them the "creeps" ; and wiser people than they would have been puzzled to account for the penetrating

OUR MR. DORMER

effect of the eyes, the "speaking" mobility of the lips. One practical outcome of that queer, mutual outstaring between original and portrait, was Our Mr. Dormer's decision that it should hang in the hall, just below the first turn in the stairs. The gentle Stephen was almost hurt, and remonstrated :

"We should like it to hang in the drawing-room !"

The old man replied briefly :

"Hang ME in the Hall !"

In the hall the portrait was hung. It commanded the side, or house door, the door into the shop, the door into the Parlour, while below it was the door to the breakfast-room, and above it the old stairs mounted to the open "landing" and the upper rooms. In fact, it dominated the whole house.

And, as if he had completed some final preparation, Mr. Dormer began to sink. The growth on the shin had deprived him of his walking powers, the loss of these in turn had undermined one by one the regular functions of a healthy body. He was still carried down into the Parlour every day, and still fumbled open the letters, but he seemed to have lost his power of speech, barely mentioning to Stephen what were apparently in his view the salient points in each morning's post. Then he would be carried upstairs, his eyes turning mechanically to the portrait as he passed under it. So,

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

eating his few slops, sleeping mostly, he would wear out the day. Stephen tried to interest him in the new proposals for penny postage, the new railway, that had actually run the twenty miles from Easthampton to Seaton, amid clouds of smoke, much deliberate waylaying, and general objurgation. Stephen himself was drafting a memorandum on the issue of bank-notes, the best of which became incorporated in the Bank Act of 1844. Our Mr. Dormer heeded not. Scarcely, when Pleasance disappeared from view, amid some commotion, and they presently brought him a little pink, squealing infant, did he smile, touch its little face with a shaking finger.

"We think of calling the boy Darcy," the flushed and rather flustered Stephen told him.

But the old man wrote on an empty envelope "Doughty Dormer," and held it out silently.

The christening was a grand affair. The young Mr. John Doughty was godfather, and attended, liverish, sombrely dressed.

Even old Mrs. Joseph Doughty, whom no one had seen for seventeen years, sent a present. And Mrs. Benders equally sent hers. Darcy was there, spruced up, erect, himself, smelling of sherry, collapsing after the luncheon Stephen gave, getting garrulous, blotchy of face, unsteady, and having to be driven home.

A highly-placed ecclesiastic officiated. As at the wedding, Stephen's nonconformist busi-

OUR MR. DORMER

ness acquaintance, Pleasance's garrison and Cathedral Close acquaintance, were there, ratifying, as it were, the social ascent of the Bank House.

But most remarkable, Our Mr. Dormer was there. At the last moment, with carriages at the door, he had rung his bell, insisted on having his hat and stick. (He carried the stick in his hand though he had not stood upright for months.) Whalebelly had to fetch a cab, and with the cabman lift him in and lift him out, and carry him, with many grunts, through the whispering concourse to the font. Then afterwards they had to carry him out.

It was his first public appearance for so long, and there was a general chorus of commiseration on his looks. One or two of the more tender-hearted or pushing, spoke to him, but he only responded with a slight nod or stare.

It was a few days after this that they called Stephen hurriedly to the Parlour. His father had finished opening the mail, the letters and envelopes lay in their piles. The old man's head had fallen back. He had dropped his special knife ; he was evidently dying. He managed to say "Close with Dayborn," and that was all.

Even Stephen, intimate as he was with Doughtys' affairs, thought for an instant before he recalled that old quasi-bankruptcy, arising out of the only unsound bills of any considerable

THE AGE OF GENTILITY

amount Joseph Doughty had ever discounted. The account, scrupulously entered up, had meandered through half a century of the old, worn "Suspense" ledger, only kept by the heads of the firm and the Dormers, had religiously appeared in each balance-sheet, the interest charged half-yearly, the amounts paid off credited with careful, lengthy notes showing against which secured or unsecured portion they told. Quite lately, the son of the original Day-born had made a comprehensive offer, under which certain properties would be released and certain others surrendered. The fact that his father should allude thus briefly to a thing that had been discussed from all points of view for so long, was to Stephen an eloquent sign that the end indeed had come. It was Pleasance's second day down, and Stephen sent for her, and she came, slowly, gently, radiant, more charming than ever, on Mrs. Benders' arm.

With glistening tears in her eyes she knelt beside the couch and took the grey old head in her hands. But even her gentle love could not call back the life that had ebbed. She had to release the cold head and let it lie back on the cushion.

And there lay Mr. Dormer, beside the morning mail, dead at his post.

PART III

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

PART III

“Peace hath her Victories”

SO Mr. Dormer died. His tough, seasoned old body ceased to function. A few days later, with bitter tears, and those premonitions of the frailty and brevity of all that is human, they placed that body in the ground it had trodden so long and so firmly. And, as happens after every one of the myriad deaths that humans die, those who were left alive, whatever their public observance, could but wonder in their hearts at Life and Death. And over their wonder spread a gradual acceptance. For the Living must go on with Life, and the Dead remain with Death. The acceptance of the facts of the case was so general, that it embraced the portrait of Mr. Dormer, hanging there in the hall of the Bank House. Those who passed beneath it ceased to look at it. It became part of the surroundings of their daily existence. Incurious, human, busy with their own little affairs, equally brief and frail, no one asked if there were more, hanging upon the wall, than mere canvas smeared with paint in certain shapes and colours conveying certain memories. But are human people ever right in so disregarding presentations of what has gone before? Is there no truth in all those

OUR MR. DORMER

legends of the Faust type—of a man “ selling ” his immortal future, legends of “ haunted ” houses so saturated with the personality of those that have inhabited them, that such personality continues perceptible ? And if ever a man sold himself, surely Our Mr. Dormer did so, to Doughtys’ Bank rather than to any Power of Darkness. If ever a house was haunted by a spirit, surely the Bank House was by his. He had given his life to the Bank ; become, in all men’s eyes, a walking presentation of that institution ; survived, if ever man survived, right in the centre of it, in his portrait, hanging, as he had directed with almost his last words, in the stone hall, where all its stairs and passages crossed. However dead he might be, there, below him, before his eyes as he hung, judge-like, God-like, crystallised for ever in his final and most perfect best-remembered shape, went on the life of the Bank which was his life, his truest immortality. If he could see (and why should he not be able to ?), thus ran the fulfilment of himself which he saw worked out before him, he, the spectator of his projection beyond himself.

In 1860, the stone hall was still constructed and furnished as Mr. Dormer had known it. The first recognisable signs of change since Mr. Dormer’s time were a sort of dull humming that swam in the dust and draught beneath the staircase. This sound gradually began to resolve itself into lowing of cattle, shouting of

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

men, footsteps and hoof-falls ; then were added the odours of decaying leaves, manure and perspiration ; then a sense of mellow midday sunshine. To any one who knew or cared for the place, this much soon became obvious. It was autumn, and market-day, and the roar of commotion from the Castle Ditches and the adjoining streets, and from the “shop” of the Bank, confirmed this. It was a busy Michaelmas market-day.

Can there be no perception of life behind the flat and confined surface of a portrait ? There was Our Mr. Dormer, eyes, nose and mouth, expression, habitual pose and colour ! Difficult to believe that he could not still feel the atmosphere of that morning, when upon the usual tides of market-day business was borne an indefinable *malaise*, a sense of something going wrong, or, as Mr. Dormer would have put it, “Not being able to keep things right.” Gradually it settled and clarified and could be understood. The Bank was in danger. But how, and from what, it took some time to understand. There presented themselves in the stone hall, beneath the portrait, various people recognisable to be servants and clerks. No longer, indeed, the servants and clerks of Mr. Dormer’s time—something upstart and independent about them—but still unmistakable in their servitude. Then there was a gentleman whom he would not have known, yet towards whom his heart

OUR MR. DORMER

might have warmed—a gentleman with extraordinary sandy whiskers, drooping on his coat-lapels, of rather more than middle height, with a very assured manner. At last some one spoke to this person by name—Mr. Doughty Dormer.

Well might Mr. Dormer stare from his portrait. It was his grandson, indeed. The tiny baby they had shown him as he lay a-dying, grandson not only of himself, but of Captain Valentine Darcy. Darcy had been tall, auburn, assured. Hence young Doughty Dormer's appearance. More important than externals, there was the quiet certainty under his manner. Mr. Dormer would have known whence that proceeded. His grandson was "keeping things right." And perhaps the spirit of Mr. Dormer, feeling its helplessness, tried to be polite to its grandson, to smirk and bow to him and compliment him on favouring both his grandparents, as a poor forlorn spirit of the Departed may, for all we know, try to court the favour of the Living.

Doughty Dormer appeared to have other things to consider, and did not even glance at the portrait. He was looking hard at the person who had thus drawn him out from the Bank into the hall of the house, in the middle of a busy market-day. He was saying in consternation :

"Paid the clearing in gold, did they? 'That's bad!'"

Surely Our Mr. Dormer, goaded by the fear

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

in his heart, must have pieced together what it was that his grandson feared. At first little could be made out, except that it was something to do with Hoppers’—Hoppers’ of Lombard Street, the Doughtys’ cousins and London agents. But the Hoppers of whom Doughty Dormer was speaking were hardly recognisable for the quiet old Quakers living over their office, that Our Mr. Dormer had known and visited. They had now a big City business, and it was this, it seemed, that had “pulled them in.” Doughty Dormer’s informant, a clerk named Chalker (oh yes, a likely youth !), had been sent to London to investigate, and had come back with a very bad report. Doughty Dormer dismissed him with :

“Send Mr. John out to me at once ; and put your expenses on a slip, on my desk.”

The words might light a glow in the heart of the portrait at the last touch. That was his grandson in very deed. Blood was blood.

But who was this? Grey-haired, with pouches under the eyes, in riding-breeches and gaiters, who came out into the hall, mouth drooping open to give asthmatical breath a chance, and saying, with no particular favour :

“Well, Dormer, what is it?”

“Very bad report of Hoppers’, sir. Chalker is back, and has heard that they paid the clearing in gold.”

Young John Doughty—for it was no other—

OUR MR. DORMER

aged, harassed, sat down suddenly in one of Our Mr. Dormer's old wooden hall chairs that had come from the Lodge in 1816.

"I have been through the Private Ledger, and there is no doubt we are heavily in."

Here might Our Mr. Dormer, from his place on the wall, frown slightly on his grandson. He would not have understood the tone. Doughty was speaking to Young Mr. John as if their positions were the reverse of what one knew them to be. But more important things intervened. Doughty Dormer was saying to the seated Mr. John :

"Lorblessme, sir, you 're not feeling right !"

Young Mr. John was gasping and holding his side. Doughty shouted down the stone passage to the kitchen :

"Warner ! Warner !" And when a whiskered and pomatumed man with a silly face appeared : "Brandy for Mr. John Doughty !"

Brandy was brought and served. When it had had a few moments to settle, Doughty Dormer resumed :

"Not only are we in, but there's no chance of our getting out ! We must have Mr. Joseph over from Seaton, and inform Mrs. Doughty !"

"Mrs. Doughty ?"

"I mean your aunt. She is a partner !"

"It will kill her, Dormer !"

"I beg leave to doubt it, sir. A very strong character."

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

"Oh dear, Dormer, my heart! I must go home. I can't stand this. To-morrow——"

"Sunday, sir!"

"—— Yes, to-morrow, drive to Overwater in the afternoon, and we'll talk it over."

"Very well, sir, but——"

"That's all, Dormer. Order the carriage."

Our Mr. Dormer would have slapped his thigh if he had heard that. Doughty Dormer received those last words with a shrug, as it were, of the eyebrows, and a proffered arm—just the way for a good and faithful servant to receive petulance passing itself off as authority. The Doughtys were going downhill; all the more necessary for the Dormers to take care, to be vigilant and faithful.

And now surely Our Mr. Dormer began, so to speak, to flutter the wings and stretch the neck of his spirit. Surely in this hour of need the very bricks and timbers of the old house cried aloud for Our Mr. Dormer to come back and save them? And surely, up there in his portrait, he could hear? Surely the Guardian Angel to which every child prays has not been a perennial myth? Surely the ancestor-worship of all time has not been one great illusion? Alas, if Our Mr. Dormer did, on that occasion, step down from his picture and try to help his grandson, it is to be feared that he was rebuffed, his old wise counsel flouted. England was passing through a decade of crude materialism,

OUR MR. DORMER

and among all the vigorous weeds that shot up in the hearts of the men of 1860, there was none stronger than the cocksureness that ousted from Doughty Dormer's heart respect for tradition and scruple as to the means he employed to gain his ends. If the spirit of Our Mr. Dormer was able to pass through the stout door of the Parlour, to hover a moment over his grandson's busy head, and pass through the farther door into the "shop," it passed unnoticed, unwanted, among a generation that did not heed. And indeed, the very furniture and personnel of the place had changed. In the 'thirties, Our Mr. Dormer had been on the point of getting more clerks. The difficulty had been, in East-hampton of the 'thirties, to find men, not merely reliable in a place where considerable quantities of money were handled, but who could be trusted not to divulge any detail of the few and simple operations of the day. Apparently it had been managed, as he now could have counted twenty black-coated figures where he had left but eleven. Eagerly might Our Mr. Dormer have bent over to watch the quills travelling across the paper, stiff and smooth, like a well-starched collar. He might have noted one or two evidences of what he considered hurry and abbreviation. On the other hand, there were facilities of which he had never dreamed ; a far greater confidence in people, and an infinitely improved currency. The desks had been

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

changed. The counter had been moved forward and lengthened. The “boy”—the junior of the clerks—no longer wrote out the letters in longhand, but squeezed them against absorbent sheets in a press. And of all that new generation, the first of the new type of hard, hurrying Englishmen, not one looked at the portrait, or called on Our Mr. Dormer.

So busy was the day that when the great front door was closed they all trooped into the house, into what had been the kitchen in the day of Mrs. Benders, and was now converted into a sort of dining-hall. Here was tea being dispensed in a great urn, cold joint, bread and butter, and, as Mr. Dormer would have thought, a most luxurious cake with currants in it. The business must indeed be doing well to pay for such luxury. And had there been any one sufficiently attentive at the noisy, steaming teatable, perhaps they might have heard the half-envious, half-contemptuous sigh of the spirit of Our Mr. Dormer over their heads, as he thought of his own spare youth and careful middle-age.

As each one finished his meal, he either slipped back to his work or sat gossiping for a few moments. For the most part the clerks had a prosperous air. They had good jobs, and knew it. Recruited with only one or two exceptions from the families of former clerks, or from the clerks in the best lawyers' or Government offices of the town, they had the dignity

OUR MR. DORMER

of a position of trust and the pleasant, and then unusual, certainty if not of a pension, yet of "something being done for them" at retirement. The possible exception was Swan, who nursed into a third generation the feud against every one of the name of Dormer.

The junior clerk came running down the passage :

"Mr. Swan, Mr. Doughty Dormer wants you !"

With his jolly face disfigured by his look of offence, habitual on such occasions, Swan went.

"Lock up, will you, Swan." (Here the keys were handed over.) "The Manager and I will be busy in the Parlour ; everything is signed !"

Swan received this with an ill-tempered nod.

Doughty Dormer, casting a quick look round, went into the Parlour, where sat, still "Manager" in name, a middle-aged man already old. It was not merely that Stephen Dormer had aged. The sudden falling on to his shoulders of his father's mantle at the age of twenty-seven had been adequately borne. Something worse than responsibility and hard work had struck him down, before he was fifty. His sightless eyes looked out, grey and filmed, upon a world they would never see again. But this was not all. Many a man has gone blind. Stephen had gone melancholy as well. Our Mr. Dormer had been crude, primitive. Stephen, with his wave of hair off the brow, his almost-elegance,

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

had been romantic, the child of an age in which imagination had been able to build beyond the present. To such a one, the calamity of blindness, thought to have been brought on by overwork, had struck with a mortal chill. Our Mr. Dormer would merely have become more stubborn under it. Stephen's spirit sank, never to rise again. But his Gentility, his sense of good manners and what was due to the public, still marched on from day to day.

Almost as a matter of course, his son, christened "Doughty," at the old man's bidding, had gone to "help" in the Parlour, had come to be recognised in a very short time as the inevitable successor—almost became, in fact, "manager," as his father drooped, inert and helpless. It was a curious development. Among the daily phenomena of Easthampton of the 'forties was a decorous, almost ornamental Stephen at the Bank, and Pleasance, a charming young mother, with a big fine baby. In 1860 it was that baby who had grown into the real manager, it was the manager who had sunk to shuffling along on Pleasance's arm.

It has been said that Our Mr. Dormer was primitive, Stephen romantic. Doughty Dormer was florid. At twenty-two he had the beginnings of sandy whiskers, the germs of Colonial expansion, of Victorian cocksureness. Something in his voice had never broken properly, so that it was gruff and rumbling as a rule, and

OUR MR. DORMER

shrill when excited. The older men about the town said he would never be the equal of his father or grandfather. But he filled more space and made more noise at twenty-three than they had in the ripest years of their prime. And, out of his very florid superficiality, came a *bon-homie*, a hail-fellow-well-met manner that went down with successive layers of industrial *parvenus* that rose to the surface from 1860 to 1890, each layer more hurried, less mature than the last.

All this was, as it were, budding, in the way he bustled into the Parlour on Michaelmas Day, 1860, and began talking to his father, without looking at the latter, where he sat, sunken and listless, keeping a semblance of gentility in the way he held himself, the folding of his hands, the set of his feet, the carriage of his head, but with no hope in his face.

Doughty Dormer was recounting the interview of the afternoon.

" . . . He told me to come to Overwater to-morrow, but I 'm not going to wait until then to see the old lady."

" I 've never seen her in all my life." Stephen's voice sounded like that of a sleep-walker.

" I 've no doubt Mr. Joseph would like to keep her in the dark, and put it off, and leave it over, as he always does ! I 've warned him a dozen times that we had too much with Hoppers' !" Doughty Dormer's voice went shrill.

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

“How much have we got?”

When engrossed in those calculations about money, the ebb and flow, the propagation and preservation of it, Stephen's face tilted up and regained for a moment a look almost of youth and health.

Doughty Dormer unlocked the private safe in the wall and got out an old sherry-coloured book, with a brass clasp-lock. Undoing this, he turned the pages, rapidly, confidently.

“Here you are. Twenty thousand was old Mr. Joseph's share. Hoppers' asked us to leave it for family reasons, whatever that may mean. It's all in Grandfather's handwriting!”

“It would be. Then we left the interest too, didn't we! Charged it half-yearly. But as their balance has gone steadily up, the result is the same!”

“Then there's the money young Mr. John lent 'em for their new branch!” The pages turned under Doughty Dormer's accustomed finger.

“Good job he didn't take a share!”

“My job entirely!” Doughty Dormer puffed out his chest: “I told him, better be a creditor than a partner!”

“Quite right, quite right!”

“It frightened him. Well, anyhow, it's bad enough! They may break at any minute. The liquidation may take months—years. I

OUR MR. DORMER

don't suppose we shall ever get within a hundred thousand of what they owe us ! ”

Stephen “ sat up ” like some old watch-dog, and said :

“ Not only that—there 's the name of the Firm. Every one knows we're ‘ in ’ with them. There must be men alive to-day who 've seen old Elijah Hopper at Meeting with old Mr. Joseph ! ”

“ That 's it ! ” Doughty Dormer brought his hand down on the old Private Ledger. “ Nothing for it but a new firm—at once ! ”

Stephen was literally forced by his blood to say :

“ No—surely—no ! ”

“ Yes. Nothing else. We 'll get in young Mr. Bird from Overwater—young Joseph from Seaton—and—oh yes ! ” Doughty Dormer stopped and referred to an index. “ Look here, about old Jane Doughty ! ” his busy fingers sought another page, “ what does she do with her money ? She draws her interest in cash every half-year.”

“ She 's very old-fashioned, I 've always heard,” put in Stephen. “ She 'll never consent——”

But Doughty Dormer had found the page.

“ Here you are. Jane Doughty ; she had the whole of old Mr. Joseph's share, under the will. She 's got a third. I thought so, from the half-yearly payments. She must be very

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

——," he mused. His father could not see what he saw, nor his face ; still less the quick shifty work in his brain !

Stephen's voice came clear and strong :

"She's a partner, she must be told she's in. You'd better go."

Doughty Dormer pulled himself up. He was going, right enough !

"The trap's coming round."

As he spoke there was jingle and hoof-fall in Middens Alley. A glance from the door showed the high wheels and gleaming lamps of the trap.

Doughty Dormer helped his father upstairs, kissed his mother, who patted his shoulder and told him to "wrap up," put on his overcoat and top hat, and running downstairs, leapt into the trap. He took the reins from the boy from the George, and twirling his whip-lash coaxingly across the mare's back, turned into Bishopgate, down Dog Lane, alive with bawling hawkers, flaring lights, drunken brawls and sprawling poverty, out through the old Northgate, into the dark and stillness of the country road.

There remained, north-east of the town, a district as wild and unknown as any in England. Bounded north and east by the sea, south by the river and its estuary at Seaton, west by the great warrens that slope away to the fens, it was largely deserted. Its roads led nowhere. But along the one that Doughty Dormer pursued

OUR MR. DORMER

lay Moor Hall. It had been an Alden property, and had come down to Jane Doughty.

Darkness is the last of the primeval things to lose its hold on us. What modern, self-conscious, super-civilised one of us but will admit, if not to being "afraid of the dark," at least to finding a curious increase of nervous sensibility under it? Doughty Dormer was so engrossed by plans, speculations, calculations, that he showed this human failing as little as may be, only to the extent of asking the boy by his side short questions as to the road, only vaguely known to him.

But if ever a ghost walked abroad, surely the spirit of Our Mr. Dormer did that night in the liquid, opaque darkness, to follow like some night-flying bird the journey of his grandson; to sweep along, above the limited radiance of the gig-lamps, in the mild, humid, October night, with its rising wind; to see the vehicle stop at a lodge gate, opened very slowly by a sleepy, doubting labourer and his son, while the wife and children peered from the lodge door, as the trap sunk into the grass-grown, never-used gravel of the drive.

A ghostly place was Moor Hall, in the dark of an autumn night. The Quaker who had restored it, more than a hundred years before, had been even stricter than that other Quaker who had built the Bank House. Originally a Jacobean manor-house, what had been a species

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

of peel tower, then incorporated in the building as porch and superstructure, still stood, its small windows and groined arcading looking out blankly from the cramped and stunted fortification of which they were a part, while two-storeyed, red-brick wings, of the same height as the tower, were built up flush with its face. The whole was now covered with a steep-tiled roof, with German dormers and Flemish gables. In fact, age was only just beginning to redeem the building from being one of those freaks of architecture seen in dreams. But age is powerful, and under its gentle persistence the old building was becoming toned and welded into something pleasant to look at—odd, original, and a perfect living history of English domestic architecture.

None of these considerations struck Doughty Dormer on that night, as he gave the reins to the boy, and, leaping down from the cloud of iridescent steam that covered mare, trap, and its occupants, thumped on the old door, hurt his fist on a nail, and thumped in another place.

It was a long time before the door seemed to yield to his repeated blows, having, in fact, been opened an inch or so.

“Who’s there?” came the query.

Doughty Dormer answered that he was, naming himself and stating that he had to see Mrs. Doughty on important business from Mr. John Doughty the Younger. He offered his

OUR MR. DORMER

card. The door was closed, softly and firmly, in his face, and he was left standing in the chilly, murmuring night. About him hung the spirit of his ancestor, smiling grimly, perhaps, in approbation of the white lie he had told ; longing to help him, perhaps, with the stored wisdom of sixty years' experience. Doughty Dormer was not thinking of any such thing. He was swiftly running over what he had to say. On his confident superficial temper the door closed in his face acted as a spur. He turned from it to the boy, sphinx-like on the seat of the trap, and back to the door, with a glance over the front of the building, as far as the gig-lamps illumined it.

He was about to knock again when the door opened, as softly as it had been closed, and he was admitted.

Years after, when Doughty Dormer's good fortune in life had become an established fact, he was a great recounter of his reminiscences, which, inherently unremarkable, became interesting on account of his curious attitude toward life, his ready acceptance of luck and the greatest possible degree of material comfort as the natural harvest of a low standard of culture and an easy laboriousness. He was like a great child for whom relations have hidden packets of toffee on the shelves, in the curtains, behind the furniture of his nursery—a child who giggles because he knows he is going to find toffee, giggles at his own cleverness when he does find

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

it, and giggles with satisfaction afterwards as he sucks it.

He used to describe his entry into Moor Hall with one of his rare, almost unique, efforts in metaphor, as "Dark and quiet . . . as . . . as the grave!" He said it with relish, "the grave" having no reality for him, and the whole episode being a piece of his cleverness.

The place had an unfurnished air, due to an effort to hide limitless comfort beneath a well-meant but helpless simplicity; for who could be simple by sheer force of getting fifteen thousand pounds per annum, spending eight hundred, giving away five thousand, and saving the remainder? The passages were bare, if clean and well kept. The doors Doughty Dormer passed had the air of being dusted every day and opened once a week. There were no pictures, and the whitened ceiling seemed far away between its black beams. Eventually he was led into a large sitting-room, completely lined with books, solidly bound and lettered, the brass-latticed book-cases only ceasing at the three tall, heavily curtained windows, the door, and the chimney-piece. In the middle of the floor was a round table and chair, on a piece of carpet, of apparently the same stout material and dull colour as the curtains. On another piece of identical size and kind stood an ample writing bureau. Beside the hearth were two high, solid, unupholstered wooden chairs.

OUR MR. DORMER

The mute serving-woman who had conducted him to this place stirred the fire, which was dying, and left him without a word.

He stood, fidgeted, sniffed. The place was so obviously calculated for the occupation of one person and one only, it gave him a sense of intrusion.

Then, in the silence and loneliness he heard a shuffling step ; as he described it afterwards, in one of his great flights of imaginative creation : “ Like . . . like something coming towards you ! ”

But far more vivid must have been the feelings of the shade of Our Mr. Dormer if he could have seen Jane Doughty enter the room. She came very slowly on her serving-woman's arm, shuffling slightly, still upright, but shrunken, lessened, with age. The presence was still commanding, the face still arresting with its beauty not of this world. But the placidity of the brow was that of immobility, the keenness of the eye a mere gleam that left a blank vacancy behind. The voice when it came was the voice of one who spoke a few monosyllables per day. The tone and clearness were not lacking, but it sounded with that sound of want of use, like an instrument seldom played.

“ Doughty Dormer, sit thou there ! ”

She lowered herself down into the chair at the bureau, and motioned to a seat by the fire to which she seemed to scorn to draw near.

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

Her serving-woman stood behind her. Behind Doughty Dormer stood the tall, silent, fidgety shadows made by fire and candlelight. For one of the rare occasions in his life Doughty Dormer was impressed. Unaccustomed silence and absence from habitual surroundings do impress such natures. He began briskly to cover his rising malaise.

"I regret having to disturb you at this hour, especially as I am unknown to you except by——"

"I knew thy grandfather."

The concise words cut through his hurrying sentence like a sword. The shadow behind him lengthened, grotesquely tall. The serving-woman stared blankly. There was not a sound. Doughty Dormer tried again.

"You will recollect that the Bank's interest in Hoppers' of Lombard Street is considerable——"

Again the still, clear, unhesitating voice broke in :

"I remember Elijah Hopper's will !"

Doughty Dormer was impressed more than ever. His habitual bluff was deserting him. He made a lightning calculation. She must be ninety. With a slight bow, a shadow of Stephen Dormer's graceful bow that had charmed the 'forties, he went on :

"I must congratulate you, Madam, on your remarkable memory. Hoppers' are in a bad

way ; they may break on Monday. It has not escaped you, I know, that there are responsibilities as well as advantages connected with your partnership in the Easthampton Bank ! ”

“ Doughty Dormer, thou may’st leave responsibilities to me and my God.”

The words were obviously sincere. Doughty Dormer, in the year 1860, knew better than to permit himself even a mental smile. He made his slight bow to God, as a man might do who knew his betters when he saw them.

“ In that case, I will venture to refer to the only safe course. The shares of yourself and partners of the present bank must be paid up in cash. Our Easthampton business must be wound up, and the whole of the assets sold to a new firm on Monday. Would you be willing, if Mr. John is, to form a partnership with the Young Mr. Joseph from Seaton and the Mr. Bird of Overwater ? I am seeing Mr. John to-morrow. Hoppers’ cannot possibly be made bankrupt in time for the news to get here before us ; but perhaps I weary you with these details——”

The old lady shook her head. As a matter of fact, a good many of the words he used meant nothing to her, but the skies might have fallen before she would have confessed it. The habit of command was strong and she meant it to outlast her hundredth birthday. She “ saw ” what had happened.

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

"Then I will have all papers prepared, and will hope for your attendance on Monday afternoon to sign the new deed of partnership. As the new capital must be subscribed at once, perhaps it would be as well to provide yourself with such cash as you may have . . .!" He stopped.

Again the old head in the linen bonnet nodded.

At some motion or sign he missed, the serving-woman had come forward, proffered an arm, and the old lady had risen, barely acknowledged his leave-taking, and was gone.

He had to wait in the dim, still room, listening to shuffling and stumping footsteps retreating amid opening and shutting of doors; then stumping footsteps returning amid more opening and shutting. He was reconducted. In silence and darkness, as he had come, he passed out again, into the October night, where the boy was leading the mare up and down in the gig.

All the way back to Easthampton he stared into the rainbow made by the gig-lamps in the steam above the mare's back, thinking.

Doughty Dormer had, for brief moments, visions of self-aggrandisement that amounted to prophecy. He felt life all too short for the immense things he might do for himself. Given a hundred and seventy years, instead of the biblical seventy, he did not know where he might stop. As it was, he was literally wasted on what he saw as his slow-moving, tradition-ridden age.

Yet, if his talents did not find full play, he shared in the colossal luck, the stupendous gambler's vein, that was one of the characteristics of the era.

He had only known of the actual state of Hoppers' since the middle of the afternoon. He had composed what he had to say to Mrs. Doughty between leaving his father and arriving at Moor Hall. Now that his father and the old lady were on his side, he regarded Young Mr. Joseph and Young Mr. John as easy game. He was already far away, seeing himself, when his father was gone, inducing the new partners to buy the other private business of the town, making a virtual monopoly of banking in East-hampton. The eventual moral consequences of his astuteness, chicanery and personal ambition, did not strike him. Having got his way of the immediate human beings encompassing him, he did not esteem it very difficult to deal with an obstacle so abstract and removed as God.

As he drove under the old bar into Northgate, and turned across to Dog Lane, he heard the chimes of the Cathedral ring out. And those notes that had been to his grandfather as the confirmation of some basic fidelity, something that changed not with the changing years, and to his father a sweet, solemn accompaniment to a love story in which the Bank had been a sort of second Pleasance, a cherished daily companion and helpmate, fell on deaf ears of a third generation of Dormers. His furtive, shallow mind

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

caught nothing of the old, simple tunefulness that for five hundred years had fallen like some blessed dew on Easthampton's struggles and anxieties. He was too busy.

Doughty Dormer was busy. He would have said that he was "making" his position. As a matter of fact, a hundred slow-working accidents, geographical, racial, climatic, and purely incidental, were bringing into prominence the sort of Englishman he was.

* * *

He was up betimes and breakfasted in unnecessary haste, recounting to his father and mother, with his mouth full, his visit of the previous night.

Stephen heard him with sightless eyes, groping hands, and that stillness of feature that made his face look as if carved in stone. As far as the partial mental paralysis, resulting from his affliction, permitted, he was approving. Pleasance sat opposite the window, a handsome, mature beauty, gazing at these two men with whom her life was cast, helping Stephen in small ways and never ceasing to marvel at the cleanly way he ate, spoke and kept himself, by sheer instinct for the Genteel.

With Doughty Dormer, it was a different case. An affectionate mother, a proud one, too, amid the universal praise showered on her son,

she could never restrain a little, very secret sigh. He was not distinguished, he spluttered, paid no heed to the small decencies of the table, talked always about himself. And in 1860 there was no one to point out that he inherited these faults from some gamekeeper, stable-boy, or kitchenmaid ancestor of hers. It was still too early for any woman's remonstrance. She barely understood the brief, brilliant campaign he was sketching out, half to save Doughtys', half to assert himself, with its perpetual note of taking advantage of this person's age and that person's absence. Stephen was too sunken to expostulate, and too loyal to interrupt any course of action so vital to the Bank and to his son.

That son finished his breakfast, pushed away his plate, and got up, shoving his chair away from him. For the next few minutes he could be heard stumping about the house, banging doors, shouting to the maids. He had put down his big driving-gloves somewhere, when he had come in the night before, and couldn't find them. Finally, after the whole household had joined in the search, they were found on the oak chest in the hall, where he had thrown them himself. The trap was at the door.

Pleasance, having helped Stephen to his place in the drawing-room, was going her morning round, looking after her maids, as she had done every morning since the decease of the lamented Mrs. Benders. She stood in the great fanlight

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

window of her son's littered, untidy bedroom and watched him drive away. There were trees then, with gardens, in Bishopgate, trees in the churchyard ; and over the roofs of the two- and three-storeyed houses were visible the trees of the real country outside, especially the hill hiding Eastwick. It was a lovely October morning, and suddenly Pleasance felt as if she wanted to cry. She was forty-six, and for nearly a quarter of a century she had been the pretty Mrs. Dormer of the Bank House. Not only had she entertained in her simple, solid way the more distinguished members of business and official circles—a judge on circuit among the latter—but she had ridden to the verge of scandal, on the backs of horses lent her by officers from the barracks. And, more definitely than ever scandal had stated it, one and another had tried to make love to her and failed—probably as much through indolence inherited from her mother as through the romantic bloom which had persisted to cover her union with Stephen.

But this morning, whether it were some autumn stirring in her heart, some memory of the time when she had gone riding in her royal-blue habit with her father (long dead of a chill caught lying all night on the garden path in a drunken sleep), or some reminiscence of the time when she had been queen of a little circle, Stephen in the foreground and a background of officers, or whether it were simply that her son,

whom she loved, was so utterly different from all she deeply felt to be right and beautiful, she wanted to cry. Yet from habit, or courage, or most of all from that very easy indolence that had kept her smooth-faced, young-looking and healthy at forty-six, she bustled herself out of the room, after her maids, down into the kitchen, about the dinner, and then to her own and Stephen's toilet for morning service.

Had Doughty Dormer been an imaginative man, he might have drawn happy augury from that morning of blue and gold. Had he been still more imaginative, he might have seen himself a little, black-coated figure in a tall, flat-brimmed hat, far less beautiful than the horse he drove, busy about matters less dignified than ever horse was burdened with, while around him inanimate nature rolled forth unheeded her autumn air, soft and matured as wine, her twice-refined October sunshine, her dew-bright colours, from grass green through every shade of yellow, red and gold, to russet and sepia brown.

But he felt none of these things. An old Quaker friend of his father and grandfather once said of him that he had "Gone away from God!" without realising how true the saying was.

He drove down Dog Lane, where the First Day School folk were astir around the Meeting House, stopped at a narrow alley called "Garden of Eden," got down and knocked at a low door, a step deeper than the pavement.

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

After some time he was answered by a dishevelled individual whose voice sounded as if it came up through layers of stout—which was indeed the fact. His long, red nose stuck out from under his nightcap. He held a shabby old coat about him with one hand, the other holding the door.

Doughty Dormer had drawn something on a leaf of his notebook and handed it to him.

“ ‘Tuesday morning, without fail ! ’ ”

The sign-writer expostulated :

“ Why, Mr. Dormer, to-day ’s Sunday——”

“ Will you do it, or won’t you ? ”

Doughty Dormer looked him in the eyes. The wretch was overdrawn at the bank. He dropped his eyes, assented and closed the door. Doughty Dormer smirked. He had no action of the risible muscles between a smirk and his boisterous laugh. He mounted into the gig and drove back across what they now called Bank Square, where the new Prospect Place (solidly rebuilt in the Bloomsbury style of architecture) and Riverside, that had developed so much since the railway was opened, met in Bishopgate opposite each other. He turned along Riverside, but avoiding the brand-new railway-station, with its dovecot clock-tower of the fashionable Peterborough yellow brick, he kept along, leaving the town by its leafy beginnings of a southern suburb, and did not draw rein until he reached the new road to the village

of Eastwick, which had been made just after the opening of the railway. It was rather longer this way, but avoided the steep climb up to the Quakers' burying-ground and the equally steep descent on the farther side. Doughty Dormer's generation was one which found easier ways round so many things. Glancing at the church clock, with its legend "Time flies—Memory remains," and at the Rectory bowered in roses, he got down and waited by the lichgate. He knew his mother had been born in the white, leaf-hidden house up there ; he could remember his Grandmother Darcy ; but his thoughts were about the property, of which he was trustee, and the coming boom in Eastwick land for suburban villa residences, which he was one of the first to foresee. The Rectory was, of course, profitably let. It was too good a house for Doughty Dormer to waste on a parson !

At present, however, all this was kept inside his head.

He had not long to wait, and he did not wait alone. The curate whom they kept in the living took a glance from the door of the little sacristy and shut it again. The labourers, tradesmen and others, with their wives and families, who waited in two lines from the lichgate to the porch, chattered and fidgeted. But soon the gate of the Rectory opened, and out sallied John Forster, the lawyer, lean, tall, still white-whiskered in the manner of the

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

'forties—immaculate in black, from the high crown of his hat to the toe of his half-Wellingtons—stiff gill-collar, stock, fob, cane and gloves complete. Behind him trotted Jonah, his man, also black-tail-coated, but carrying himself with the cringe of his kind. So great a man was John Forster, that even Doughty Dormer raised his hat as he whispered a word at the lych-gate. The lawyer turned on his heel, took his prayer-book and Bible from Jonah, with these orders :

“ Mr. Dormer's horse and trap will put up. Mr. Dormer is lunching ! ” which sent Jonah back to the Rectory at his usual trot, with the boy from the George leading the mare in the trap behind him.

John Forster kept at the Rectory much more state than even Mrs. Blomfield, afterwards Mrs. Darcy, had done. For while the poor lady had had to “ do ” on the carefully pruned allowance which resulted from the management of her affairs by Our Mr. Dormer, and subsequently Stephen—an allowance calculated to keep her in comfort without leaving any margin for her second husband's indulgences—John Forster had the entire income from one of the oldest and best-known solicitors' practices in the county, together with all the official and semi-official salaries of the jobs that naturally gravitated to such a centre, as well as a handsome private income of his own. Living unmarried, his

OUR MR. DORMER

house was kept by a maiden sister of much the same age, and in even a more perfect state of preservation, at a rare level of cleanliness and order. In the great wide dining-room (deserted-looking and fenced off to half its length in Mrs. Blomfield's day) the square wooden panels were now painted an immaculate white, with candles in brass sconces and engravings in orange-coloured satin-wood frames, in the proper position on each. The maroon curtains hung stiff as leather, pair by pair, by the shutter-panels of the windows. Down the whole length ran the great table, whose cloth, always laid and immaculate, bore covers for a score, silver and plate and glass at each for five courses and five wines. In the centre of all was a five-legged, five-branched epergne, carrying sweetmeat dishes, candle-sockets, and at the very summit, with all the complexity of cherubim and garlands the Victorian silversmiths could add to an originally comely Georgian model, a boat-shaped receptacle for fruit or flowers.

There was, in fact, about John Forster's table, even at so minor a festival as lunch, a brilliance of colour, a sense of form, that might have made a speculative guest wonder whether he were taking part in a mortal meal, or assisting at some dread and gorgeous altar, at a mystery of Faith. He might have glanced at the face of John Forster, presiding at the table, or at that of his sister, Miss Madeleine Forster, or at

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

those of Jonah or the maids, and still not have been able to decide.

John Forster, in the year 1860, had all that certainty of himself and his authority, all those material resources of cellar and larder, pantry and kitchen, that made the consumption of three ample meals a day not only a matter of habit to him, but of importance to half a score of people dependent upon him, who were necessary to these daily rites.

Having sat through the morning service, with Doughty Dormer beside him in what had been the pew of the Squires of Eastwick, and which he left only to read the lessons, John Forster had a word with the incumbent, and another with one or two parishioners. The service had had a dry and mellow flavour about it, which moderns vainly try to recapture in potations of sherry and bitters. The few words in the porch were drier still.

After this, he led Doughty Dormer across to the Rectory garden, where, in the old summer-house in which Darcy had courted Mrs. Blomfield and Stephen had "proposed" to Pleasance, the lawyer composed himself to hear what Doughty Dormer had to say, fare drier and more appetising than ever.

By the time that Jonah came across the garden and stood waiting at a respectful distance to announce lunch, both gentlemen had an edge on their appetite. Not that an appetite was

necessary. Beside the game pie (mottled with eggs, brilliant with jelly, crowned with tiers of golden decorative pastry), a brawn, firm with its mosaic of truffle and creamy fat, there was the inevitable cold sirloin, with its rich, pungent horse-radish sauce. There were apple tart and trifle, custard and syllabubs, a fortress of Stilton, apples from trees that had had sixty years of loving care, grapes from the rich tilth of a vinery soaked with bullocks' blood and primest corruption, walnuts from the walk by the wall, and medlars. And as if this were not enough, there were sherry like pale autumn sunshine, claret in its twelfth year, Madeira such as man, alas, would never taste again.

It is characteristic that the ultra-modern Doughty Dormer, for all his materialism, knew and appreciated these good things, could simulate, even if he did not feel, the correct and elaborate deportment which Miss Madeleine Forster's presence demanded. He was yet young and pliant, trying on his first great scheme. John Forster was a man to propitiate, to enlist ; and as Doughty Dormer rose from the table, the tingle of his last half-glass of Madeira still crisp in his mouth, he felt a sensation inside him as if his interior were rubbing its hands with satisfaction. He had done it. John Forster had said: "Very well, Dormer, I will wait upon you, at the Bank, to-morrow, at three !"

Poor indeed is the man who, once in his life

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

at least, does not feel his spirit lifted off its feet, as it were, on some rising flood of dreams, warm and golden. There was something about Doughty Dormer, even at his worst, that could not be called poor—something rich and florid. Probably no man was ever happier than he, driving in the crisp, Madeira-coloured sunlight of the autumn afternoon, the benediction of Madeira on his spirit. What he saw no one can tell, for his dream lacked the breadth and depth necessary for any survival, permanence or universality. But happy he was, happy he must have been, or he could not have used the velvet hand he did on the two people he was to meet. Gently he turned the mare in between the Lodge gates of Overwater, up the well-kept drive, and gently drew up in front of the house, where Mr. Joseph Doughty the younger from Seaton, and Mr. John Doughty, his brother, were walking up and down.

The younger Joseph Doughty took after his father more decisively than young Mr. John. He inherited not only the comeliness of person, but something of the calm certainty of the man of the world that had from time to time supervened over the Quaker in the original John.

Doughty Dormer, dismounting lightly, approached them with lifted hat. Mr. Joseph said quietly : " Well, Dormer, how are you ? " and Mr. John : " Oh, Dormer, what 's to be done ? "

It was curious how young Mr. Joseph and

OUR MR. DORMER

young Mr. John had varied the type of their father and uncle. Young Mr. John had the former Mr. Joseph's look of starving the flesh, without the spiritual strength, and with no foundation in reality. Young Mr. Joseph had his father's mundane urbanity, without that perpetual appearance of playing second fiddle. Doughty Dormer stood before them on the terrace that autumn afternoon, against a background of trees and mild East Anglian sky that Crome or Cotman might have painted, and talked to a point between them. He wanted Mr. Joseph's cool judgment and energy, he also wanted Mr. John's invalid dependence.

"I've done all that can be done, sir. All partners meet to-morrow, at the Bank, at three. John Forster will be there."

"Has it come to that?" sighed John.

"You've taken a good deal on yourself," said Joseph.

Doughty Dormer thought valour was the better part of discretion.

"We've no time to lose, sir. Hoppers' haven't committed an act of bankruptcy yet, but they may do by ten o'clock to-morrow. The news can't well be here before four o'clock. By that time we shall have formed a new firm—Forster's drawing the deed, Nichols is engraving the door-plate. . . ."

"Dammit, Dormer," broke in Mr. Joseph, flushing, "who the devil do you think you are?"

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

Doughty Dormer reflected for a flash on human ingratitude, but not for long. He was only too well aware in the background of his mind that he was doing one stroke for Doughtys' and two for himself.

“There's no time to be lost, sir. If, as is quite possible, Hoppers' burst to-morrow, we shall have some one down Tuesday morning by the first train, spreading the news, and talking in all the pubs. If that happens, we might get a run by Saturday !”

Mr. John said, “Oh, Dormer !” and Mr. Joseph, “Very well, then !”

They went on to talk facts and figures. Doughty Dormer had a pentecostal tongue that afternoon. Perhaps it was John Forster's Madeira, or maybe his great ancestor, hovering around him in spirit all those days, trying in vain to pat his cheek or shoulder, to show its appreciation of him, its love, its reverence for this direct result of itself, managed to reach him through the veils that divide the living from the dead, with its sure old, iron-bound wisdom ; or was it simply the spirit of the 'sixties, the bold, easy opportunism of men who had all the physical advantages and none of the competitors that were afterward to spring up, the beginning of the cheerful adventurousness that was to end in the Boer war ?

Doughty Dormer had it all his own way. He drove back in the crisp twilight, tickling the

flanks of the mare with the whip-lash, smirking to himself. In him, that hour, some part of a new England was born.

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Solemn, with a solemnity now gone from business, was the scene on the Monday afternoon. At that time perhaps a third of the population of England could read and write, but a far smaller number understood figures, or kept banking accounts, and conducted their affairs decently and in order, lodging with the bank drafts, notes or coin, in due course, one by one, and drawing large cheques payable to bearer, in cash, with which they made their disbursements.

To this small and privileged section of the community it was clear that something was afoot. Mr. Joseph Doughty from Seaton was seen to be in the town, but did not leave the Bank after lunch. At half-past two Mr. John Forster drove up from his office in the Cathedral Close, accompanied by his clerk, carrying a crimson bag such as is only seen now in the hands of K.C.'s. But still more wonderful was that which followed. At three o'clock exactly there rolled up Northgate and Dog Lane, across Bishopgate, and up to the Bank door, an old carriage painted mouse-grey, on wide C-springs, drawn by two horses so old and fat that their

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

trot was little more than a walk, driven by an old, fat coachman in an iron-grey wig. The conveyance stopped. No footman leapt down, for none was there ; but from within, a hand and wrist, hard, strong, and coarse as a man's, protruded, turned the handle, and opened the door. The serving-woman descended. She turned, offered her arm, and for the first time in forty years those who were passing in the street saw Jane, Mrs. Joseph Doughty.

To say that the passers-by were impressed is nothing. Doughty Dormer himself, now that he saw her away from her own special surroundings, and amid those which were to him the only normal and ordinary ones—that is, the ones proper to eighteen-sixty—was astonished at her air as of another world—the forgotten shape of her bonnet ; her cloak, high-waisted, inclined to catch at the knees. She was upright, but shuffled slightly. Her face was set, her mouth closed as though never to open ; but her eyes, though looking straight before her, with a rather fixed stare, seemed to take everything in.

She proceeded across the “shop” to the Parlour on the arm of her bodyguard, and disappeared behind the panelled door.

The clerks, who had instinctively drawn together, as men will before an omen, dispersed again to their work. None of them remembered her. They did not know what to make

OUR MR. DORMER

of it, coming on top of the assembly in the Parlour.

Behind the panelled door, the old lady had taken her place in the chair which had been her husband's. She had been met at the door by her nephews, announced by Doughty Dormer, but not a word did she say. The black-coated men stood around her, and there was a moment's silence. No one knew how to begin.

The old lady's eyes travelled from one to the other, and seemed to have the effect of paralysing them. Finally her gaze rested on John Forster, standing there in his spotless black cloth and white linen, glistening silver hair, and pink-and-white satin-textured complexion of an age of easy conscience and good wine. He was willing enough to speak, and did so with the sure dignity of a Bishop addressing an Archbishop, bowing slightly.

"The circumstances which rendered urgent your presence to-day have been explained. The situation is indeed so urgent, that I have taken it upon myself to draw up a rough draft of a new deed of partnership. This deed, if signed, will provide for the purchase of the business of the old firm of Doughty by a new firm, the partners of which you see around you, and of whom you are one. If drawn, the deed will necessitate the payment of sums which can only be found with your help. If not drawn, the partners of the old firm, yourself included, by to-morrow

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

may find yourselves compelled to close these doors. The other parties to this transfer are agreed. It is for you to say if I may draw the deed.”

The silence which succeeded was so complete, that Doughty Dormer, coming out of the spell of John Forster’s rhetoric (for it was still only 1860, and the spoken word was still worth speaking carefully, with a certain pomp, and listening to with respect), noticed it and fidgeted. Outside in the street a cart rumbled. In the garden leaves detached themselves from the baring branches and floated down.

At last the old lady spoke. Her voice, clear as it was, seemed faint, faded, like a voice not often used. She said simply :

“ John Forster, thou wilt draw the deed.”

There was a movement among the men who watched her like the release of a spring in each one. John Forster recovered himself first.

“ May I congratulate you ? ” Then a sort of struggle going on in him was apparent, which may have been between the man and the lawyer. He went on :

“ It seems preferable that the consideration should be deposited to-day ! ” . . . and turned to Doughty Dormer, who was exhibiting a bunch of signed documents, drafts and cheques in his hand, like a pack of super-cards.

“ I have the requisite amount from all the partners of the new firm, yourself excepted.

OUR MR. DORMER

May I know where I can obtain the funds, your account not being——?”

It required a brazen young man like Doughty Dormer to get so far. Even he got no further.

The old lady did not even look at him. She spoke to John Forster, in the same quiet tone :

“John Forster, I have said, thou wilt draw the deed.”

John Forster bowed. Every one was at a loss. The old lady, motioning to the gaunt serving-woman behind her chair, received from that person a great old steel-clasped bag, too huge for a reticule, too flat for a brief-bag. “Home-made” was stitched into every fold. Opening this, she produced and handed to Doughty Dormer a flat packet, which he immediately satisfied himself was composed of one hundred Bank of England notes of one hundred pounds each, smoothed out very flat, many practically unused and dated long ago. Before he had time to finish counting them, while his lips and fingers were still going “Ninety-one—ninety-two—ninety-three,” he was conscious that the old lady’s firm brown hand was tendering a second packet. He hurriedly finished his “ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred,” put the first packet under a weight on the desk, and received the second, with a bow. Its contents were the same.

When a third packet was tendered, Doughty

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

Dormer glanced round the circle of astonished faces, rubbing his fingers, cramped with counting, against the front of his coat. Reading acquiescence on every face, he made a gesture of refusal.

“We have what is needful.”

“Thou mayest place the superfluity to my account.”

There was no denying the old lady. Doughty Dormer felt compelled to do as he was told (and he was a young man spoiled by telling other people what to do). He took the third bundle and some sundry envelopes (at a hasty glance as they were handed to him, they appeared to be bonds and deeds), checked them and made a memorandum. Then he waited. It almost seemed as though some one of those black-coated waiting men must express the thankfulness they all felt, or that John Forster would feel it due to the occasion to embalm it in his professional rhetoric. But the old lady was already on her feet, her hand on the serving-woman's arm. Doughty Dormer had only just time to get the door open, and see that the carriage was in readiness.

When he returned to the Parlour, nothing remained to prove that the whole incident was more than a dream, save the pile of wealth on the desk, and his own neat column of figures on the slip of paper beside it. John Forster was talking, in slow, rounded periods, but he was

OUR MR. DORMER

interrupted by the necessity for making appointments and plans for the future.

Young Mr. Joseph seemed the most awake. He asked Doughty Dormer :

“ What induced my aunt to bring all that cash ? ”

Doughty Dormer was too triumphant for disguise.

“ I suggested it ! ”

“ The devil you did. How did you know what she 'd got ? ”

“ I know most things about the business, and it was pretty obvious that Mrs. Doughty was drawing more cash than she could possibly spend ! ”

“ What 's that to you ? ”

Doughty Dormer's small patience nearly gave way.

“ Surely, Mr. Joseph, the money is better employed in saving your business than in lying in the old lady's cash-box ? ”

“ Possibly—but why didn't you mention this to me and to my brother yesterday ? ”

Doughty Dormer suppressed a desire to say, “ Because you might not have consented to put all your eggs in the basket I 'm carrying,” and substituted : “ Because I knew I was right ! ”

Young Mr. Joseph had one of those gleams of prophecy that sometimes visit the children of Quakers.

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

“ Depend upon it, Dormer, one day you will know too much ! ”

* * *

The following morning, as early carts rumbled and early workmen slouched, tools a-shoulder, through the bitter cold mist of the October dawn, a person of whom only a red nose and bristly chin were visible between cap and collar, carrying a bag of implements, followed by a weedy, scraggy boy, who carried two large hard objects swathed in greasy cloths, crossed Bishopgate to the Bank.

Whalebelly, asleep in his sentry-box, was awakened with difficulty and mollified with promises of drink. He unlocked the gate in the railings, and man and boy busied themselves before the pillars that flanked the main entrance.

Before nine o'clock, the hour at which Doughty Dormer descended shouting and stumping amid incoming juniors and outgoing charwomen, there shone resplendent on the twin pillars of the porch a new brass plate, “ Doughty, Bird & Doughty, late J. & J. Doughty, Bank.”

* * *

When he looked back, in after years, over a life which caused him considerable satisfaction, Doughty Dormer always dated his success from

OUR MR. DORMER

this incident. It does, indeed, bear his stamp, his air of doing one stroke for the Bank and two for himself. Of all the people who stood round him in that group, he had not honestly opened his heart to a single one. Entrenched in his central position, getting first-hand information of what was going on, while keeping all the others in part ignorance, he was able to bend all of them to his plan—his own plan with its specious disinterestedness. All those stronger characters and longer purses were bound to back him up, for their own sakes ; and how much more there was in it that was to his advantage, they could not see and he did not point out. Just as his grandfather had fired a pistol-shot and risen on its reverberations to a previously undreamed-of pinnacle, just as the gentle and gentlemanly Stephen had leapt a garden wall and up several steps in the social ladder at a bound, so Doughty Dormer rose on the wings of the occasion.

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The sandy-whiskered, black-coated Doughty Dormer, in gill-collar and top hat, who read the news of the Franco-Prussian War, willing to see France weakened, unwilling to see Germany greatly strengthened, was a remarkable figure, if only on account of the supreme ease of mind he enjoyed. He worked, moderately hard—less hard than his father or grandfather—and

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

business grew and grew. He married, almost as a side issue ; children came, were easily fed, clothed and educated on a growing income of which each pound, as years went by, could purchase more and wider material facilities of an easy, spacious life. The tradition he handed on to his children, the atmosphere in which he—or, rather, his wife—brought them up, differed essentially from anything the elder Dormers had known. They remembered humility ; if not poverty, at least very limited circumstances. Owing to Our Mr. Dormer's careful, saving habits, Stephen had a good private income after his father's decease, and Pleasance spent it well. She chose and controlled her servants with all that tincture of aristocracy that was in her. Where Stephen had been told, as a boy, by Mrs. Benders to behave "like a little gentleman," Doughty Dormer was told, as a boy, to "be a little gentleman"—all the difference in the world.

Stephen Dormer never saw, with his failing eyes, his first grandchild. On his son's marriage, being now completely blind, he had gone to live with Pleasance in the Old Rectory at Eastwick, from which John Forster had passed, leaving the Bank House to Doughty Dormer and his young wife and family.

It was quite one of the sights of Eastwick of the 'sixties and 'seventies, on fine Sunday mornings, to see the hired cab jolt and jingle out

OUR MR. DORMER

of King's Head yard, across the road, and, turning in a wide semicircle, pull up at the white-painted garden gate of the Rectory. Down the path from the pillared portico would then come a very handsome, well-preserved woman (Pleasance had put on flesh and become rather dignified with passing middle age), leading by the arm a mild, courteous old gentleman, bent with hard work and age, and with the pathetic helplessness of the blind. He was dressed in neat but old-fashioned black clothes, that rather hung on a form from which the fulness and vigour had departed, and, mounting into the cab with difficulty, sat with head bowed above his hands, that clasped his silver-headed stick. Beside him his wife sat, with that queenly carriage that had distinguished her first pony-rides with her father, distributing bows or nods as people appeared to her to require those distinct grades of greeting.

Up the hill went the hired cab, and at the top, as the prospect over Eastwick and the seaward valley was closed, and that over Easthampton and the landward one opened, Stephen would turn his head to the right, where behind a moss-grown wall the weeping ashes and acacias of the Quakers' burying-ground festooned their graceful foliage—that spot of quiet beauty in repose where he so soon must lie. And it was curious to see the loverlike way in which his wife's hand would creep under his

"PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES"

arm and give him a little squeeze, as if they were again the loving young couple that had won consent from Our Mr. Dormer and Captain Valentine Darcy. But her face was unmoved in its sweet autumnal dignity, and by the time they were meeting, in Bishopgate, the long crocodile of the Seminary for Young Ladies, the Grammar School, and sundry black-coated individuals on their way to Morning Service, she was once more distributing bows and nods, as required, her gloved hands folded in her lap.

The hired cab turned down Dog Lane and stopped at the Friends' Meeting House. A very clean, neat little boy ran forward, opened the door of the cab, and offered a shoulder to Stephen, who, leaning on it, descended ; then turning back towards his wife, " 'Twelve o'clock, my dear ! "

" Yes, twelve o'clock."

The hired cab drove her off to the great west door of the Cathedral. Here, in all the super-respectability of the Close, were all the people for whom Pleasance had any respect. She bowed to Mrs. Colonel Burnham. The Dean's wife inquired after the health of Mr. Stephen Dormer, the wife of the member for Easthampton went in beside her. Had she only known, this was perhaps the real observance to which she attached most importance. She was still " some one " in Easthampton. The rest was a misty habit of music, and sunshine through

OUR MR. DORMER

painted glass, old regimental flags hanging motionless and ragged in the gloom, old stately phrases intoned.

The Morning Prayers, sweetened and melowed by their very well-worn use, drew to an end, with the quaint superposition of mediæval vestment, phrase, and melody on the black-coated respectability of an English Protestant Cathedral. Pleasance came out with a sense of relief which she was far, in her unselfconscious good-nature, from suspecting to be due to the fresher air and freer position she enjoyed, after sitting and kneeling in mouldy twilight. The hired cab was ready, the hired horse's nose-bag stowed away, the hired driver on his seat, with all his air of being very nearly as good as a family coachman. Pleasance took her seat, and as the door was shut upon her, assumed her air of being quite as good as any lady born who rode in her own carriage. And indeed she was the picture of a thoughtless, healthy, lovable, middle-aged Britannia, with bonnet for helmet, parasol for trident.

The hired cab rocked and jolted at its steady trot out through the Crusaders' gateway into Bishopgate, out of prosperous Bishopgate into less prosperous, part mediæval, part rebuilt, modern industrial Dog Lane. At the Friends' Meeting House there would be a great scampering of very clean little boys and girls, opening of big old oaken doors, disclosing Stephen

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

sitting a little apart in the clean, bare school-room, bowed and shrunken, but at peace among the sounds and smells that made up, to his uncritical senses, the praise of God and the odour of sanctity.

His quiet, rather shy, “Good-bye, boys and girls,” drew a long-echoing murmur of “Good-bye, Mr. Dormer, sir !” and he would come out on the arm of the dour, leathery head teacher, a forewoman in Saint’s new button factory hard by. Having asked if a cheque was required toward expenses, he would promise it and mount into his seat beside his wife.

The next journey of the hired cab was short—only up Dog Lane and along Bishopgate to the Bank House. Here, when the door opened, Stephen and Pleasance would be welcomed by the loud, rough voice of Doughty Dormer, and the shrill cries of, in the early days, first one, then two little girls, and later, just before Stephen died, of a little boy. The whole party would go upstairs (the Bank had now absorbed the whole ground floor of the old house) to the well-spread table that Doughty Dormer kept. Stephen was necessarily silent and passive, sitting a bit turned away in his chair by the fire, eating and drinking sparingly and slowly, only interjecting a word on some point of business, about which Doughty Dormer, flourishing long before the day when it became “bad form” to “talk shop,” never ceased from gabbling. The chil-

OUR MR. DORMER

dren, who had never known their grandfather otherwise than old and blind, would come up to him at times, and stand with one little hand on his knee, looking up into his blank, wintry smile.

Pleasance, on the other hand, was her grandchildren's Heaven and Earth combined. With her instinctive authority she corrected their little faults, while her beauty and easy good-nature made her their chosen playmate. And more than ever at these Sunday midday dinners, she indulged herself and them to drown her instinctive distaste for her son's manners. However she had borne a son who, though loved and not unloving, showed at every turn a cheap vulgarity that was in neither of his parents, she could not divine. And while he talked loud and long of his projects—the extension of the office buildings over the whole of the remaining garden (inevitable foible of his generation), the price of Consols, the coming Imperialism, the destruction of old derelict St. George's Church to make room for a factory—she tried to close her ears with children's prattle and antics against the conscious patronage and shallow cleverness of their father. Only once was she shocked into speech. Herself born without need of the consolations of Religion, satisfied with life when it went well, stoic when it went ill, she had an intense respect for outward religious forms, chiefly represented to her mind by the national Church. Next to that, the old-

“PEACE HATH HER VICTORIES”

established decorum of the Quakers seemed admissible, particularly for one so loved as Stephen. Doughty had taken another course. He had allied himself with those more numerous and prominent Nonconformist bodies that were just rising into popularity. Standing with his legs apart, hands in pockets, back to the fire, a living image of bad manners, he was declaiming loudly that he and his fellow-deacons of his particular brick-and-frosted-glass, varnished-pine-seated chapel paid their way, while the Church was simply a public tax on commerce, and would have to look sharp, people weren't going on paying for what they didn't want. Pleasance stood up with a short “For shame, Doughty, hold your tongue!” so that the children stopped their play to look at their Granny.

Doughty Dormer gasped, Stephen raised his sightless face.

Almost alarmed at the sensation created by her instinctive outburst, she at once bent her head to the little ones and took up the thread of the story she had been telling. “And so little Snow-white, when she found she had broken the baby bear's chair, didn't know what to do! . . .”

Doughty Dormer grumbled to himself that women were all alike. But he was more careful of his speech after that, and respected what he called his parents' “prejudices.” What did it matter, he and all his kind were making money

OUR MR. DORMER

fast. Had he ever raised his eyes from the ground, he might have seen, in the old portrait hanging on the wall, the token of an older and surer philosophy. Our Mr. Dormer had known England small and struggling. The days of easy prosperity made no call on him. He sat there above them all, glowing as his colour matured and his varnish toned, bemused in his golden and ever more golden dream.

PART IV

JUBILEE

PART IV

Jubilee

THERE was surely something in the atmosphere of the 'nineties that suited the portrait. It was in this decade that it first became generally noticed. Perhaps it was the substitution of gaslight, bathing the old face in steady orange glow, instead of the earlier candles and occasional lamps that were but distorting, making it the portrayal of a menacing, moving giant. Or it may be that fifty years is about the right time for a portrait to come to its own, that in just such a period paint and varnish, canvas and oil melt together into a fifth thing that is at once all of them and none. But most of all the portrait changed because the people who looked at it had changed. Few of those who now passed beneath it had ever seen Our Mr. Dormer in the living flesh. He had already become a legend, a person about whom it was said, not : "He did this, that, the other !" but : "They say he did this, that, the other !" This last was perhaps the most important factor of all, for it was a time at which people began rather suddenly to remember and marvel at the past, recalled to them by the striking fact of the Diamond Jubilee. The original Jubilee had been a matter for great congratulation, not only to the

OUR MR. DORMER

Sovereign Lady whose reign it crowned, but to the land over which she ruled. Progress had been remarkable, Peace increasingly general. The acceleration of life by machinery had begun. Doubt and discomfort, discord in politics and periodical depressions in economics seemed to be receding rapidly into the background. And when, after ten years, the Diamond Jubilee superimposed upon the former festival, enthusiasm was doubly redoubled. What a space to look back over ! What a way we had come from the barbarism of the 'forties, the archaic wars and pretentious childish "industry" of the 'fifties ! Let's see, what is left of those queer old times ?

To people associated with Doughtys' Bank in Easthampton, there, palpable enough, was old Mr. Dormer's portrait on the wall. Those who had loved or feared the old man were almost gone ; those who now saw it thought it a curio, a relic, a "sight." It was.

But what did the portrait think of them, men and women of the 'nineties, with their hairy faces and crinolineless skirts, wicker furniture and earnest complacency ? How did it strike him, the talk of new investments far overseas, non-conformist Imperialism, cheap books and travel ? To him, the Colonies had meant something just lost, or something that might always be lost at any moment. Now here they were, Empire and Dominion and Commonwealth, like the end

JUBILEE

of the Lord's Prayer translated into some foreign tongue. More than any living thing, he had not changed. Around him, the old stone hall in which he hung, alone had remained constant to him. The office had been extended and refurnished, the house had been redecorated and sanitated, the garden built upon ; almost every building in the street had been refronted if not entirely rebuilt. But the old hall was as Joseph Doughty had left it, with its four massive doors, its broad, shallow stair, its single wooden chair, and clock. Push handles and patent springs might be on the doors ; at some hours of the day the place might resemble a busy crossroads rather than the side entrance of a Georgian dwelling-house. Yet for most of the hours of most of the days, it remained, under the presidency of Our Mr. Dormer, up in his portrait, a hard and empty shell, left stranded by the Past, full of reverberations of the Present, and of unreadable presage for the Future.

If an old man, hung up there in his portrait, can have any conception of time, he might have noticed that the climax of that crescendo decade came in June 1897. It came inevitably. It was composed of the length of the days and the brilliance of the season, and of the two engrossing subjects of which all who passed through the stone hall talked and thought with increasing concentration. The main subject was the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, but the more

OUR MR. DORMER

intimate was the coming absorption of the old firm of Doughty, Bird & Doughty in the new great combine headed by their London Agents, Hoppers' of Cornhill.

Very strange must these matters have appeared to Our Mr. Dormer. True, he remembered George the Third, whose reign had been passably long, but there was nothing in the fact to congratulate any one about. As for that other business, it was naturally incomprehensible. He had left Doughtys' Bank as Doughtys' Bank, not so much an institution as a building that housed certain specified activities. Long after his death had come the momentous step of opening a "branch," as it was called, in some neighbouring market town. Later still the gradual buying up or taking over of various small banking houses up and down the county. Even the Seaton business had been in his day a separate and distinct undertaking, whose very books were ruled differently, and which certainly did not regard itself as being in any way dependent on the Easthampton office. The only connection, in fact, had been that some of the capital in each was owned by the same people. And there may have been, besides incomprehension, a sense of ineffectiveness, for what can a portrait do?—and considerable disbelief that all this talk would ever end in deeds—for Our Mr. Dormer had always been a man of action himself, and sparing of words

JUBILEE

as if they had been something precious and ornamental.

But there was no mistaking the bustle of this June morning. It had begun overnight, hardly ceased during the brief darkness, gone on with redoubled vigour all the early hours, and was now in that state of swirling expectancy as of a firework about to bang. Knocking in the Market Place, chatter and incessant footfalls in the street, flowed into and echoed in the stone hall. There was more resonance than usual, for the office was hushed as on a Sunday, doors closed, windows shuttered, books and cash all battened down in the safe, by special Order in Council. This may have impressed the immobile old man up there. Knocking of hammers and hastening of feet was as likely to mean a public execution as anything else, to him. Yet here were the family coming downstairs, all dressed up. There was no mistaking the fact that they were going to a public rejoicing. And he had heard, from half-past six onward to breakfast time, the milkman and the baker and the boy who brought the *Courier*, discussing the day's doings with the servants, in their several turns, and according to their divers degrees of information or capacity for appreciation.

Downstairs they came ; Doughty Dormer, now a portly man nearing sixty, bald and with greying whiskers that brushed the lapels of his

OUR MR. DORMER

black tail-coat. How the Darcy strain had come out in him, florid and resonant in his voice, whiskers and ideas ! He was no longer a mere chief clerk, like his old grandfather up there, watching so unblinkingly. He was a Manager. He sounded it. He was giving orders at every step. Next came his wife. A new type also. She had survived domesticity, her children were either grown up or at school, and she had abundant energy left for culture and good works. Not for her the fate of the first Mrs. Dormer ; not for her the small sociabilities of Pleasance. Behind her came one daughter (as yet unfinished), the elder one being in Germany (where she was being finished). At the back of all came a schoolboy. Very Dormer indeed was he. Queer how the shape of bones and little mannerisms, dropped for two or three generations, cropped up again. This boy, too, was a noticing lad. He alone of the party cocked his eye up at the portrait of his great-grandfather. The old man scowled back. He was no fancier of boys, could hardly imagine that he had ever been one ; had lost, so long ago, all means of imagining himself in their place. Did he put down to bad conscience that rather hesitating glance of a young face up at him ? The young rascal had something on his mind. It could hardly occur to an old man in an old portrait, that he was in himself very impressive, from sheer age, unfamiliarity of dress and clear-

JUBILEE

shaven jowl, steady old eyes, and, above all, his arresting immobility.

Doughty Dormer led them away, chiding them as if they were late, though they were really in perfectly good time, from a habit of chivying reluctant repayers of overdrafts. The servants were duly admonished, the door was slammed, and the old portrait was left to ruminate. But not for long. Lookers-on see most of the game. The silence of the stone hall was soon shivered by the echo of a new commotion. It was something very big, not inharmonious ; and at last he made it out. He had heard Doughty Dormer say that they would have difficulty in getting to their seats to see the rejoicings in the Market Place. He had also learned from various gossip that all the knocking had meant the erection of wooden stands for the school children. They were to sing, the children. That was what he had learned. The old face grew blank with bewilderment. Children in his day had been seen and not heard. Children actually singing had suffered immediate and effective suppression. Never had he for one moment supposed that they could be part of a Royal Celebration. What a noise ! It must be coming clean across the roofs of the houses in George Row, over Middens Alley. Rhythmical and sweet, the young unbroken voices in their thousands were bound together, as it were, by brass wind instruments posted

OUR MR. DORMER

among them. What was it : " God bless our native land "—then something he didn't know and didn't like (naturally)—then a hymn. He was no man for hymns, never had been. Then " God Save the Queen." Hah ! He remembered her Coronation. She had come to this ! A trifle redundant. God had saved her, and no mistake.

Silence now. The old man looked ironic. They had spent their breath. These processions of children, this singing and glorification were not to his taste. It was as though the Bible stories were being enacted before him. He definitely disliked that. The Bible was sacred. This meant that it was dead—past—fixed and done with. To bring it to life was to rob it of its principal quality.

But he need not have feared. Something very different and more to his taste was afoot. There was an ordered trampling, brief harsh words of command, a sudden silence, and then the ear-splitting racket of the first volley of a *feu de joie*. Pause, and then again, and yet again. The old face turned almost benignant. This was better. Half a Quaker, always the servant of Quakers, he was no militarist. But he had passed the prime of his life under the menace of that Usurper over the Channel, who had discovered to such effect that if one only shot people with grape-shot, they could not subsequently argue with one. Our Mr. Dormer

JUBILEE

had quite agreed with him. War was wrong, no doubt ; but a good show of force upon occasion strengthened authority. The Queen's Coronation and Marriage had both been purely military shows. It appealed to something primitive, pre-Doughty in him.

Now the sound was more diffused. The great crowd that had congregated in the Market Place to hear the children sing, and see the soldiers shoot, was dispersing. Some, no doubt, the more respectable section, Dowsers, and so on, would go to one of the places of worship that were holding services of Thanksgiving, Commemoration, Jubilation. Some would be off to the new Recreation Ground on the Moor Hall road, to see the sports. But in the main, the Easthampton crowd—he knew them, no one better—would just promenade up and down the streets, gape at each other, and go home to their dinners. That was what a Diamond Jubilee meant to them. They wanted nothing better. All the weeks of all the year they toiled and moiled in the tanyards and manure works, shops and warehouses, and a day off meant a day spent in the Market Place or Bishopgate, down to the railway station at one end and up to the public gardens at the other. He shared their notions of enjoyment. It was exactly what he would have done, had he ever had a day off. But he never had had.

And meanwhile, where had Doughty Dormer

OUR MR. DORMER

gone? Well aware for many years that his position demanded that he should go to church, not to chapel, wife on arm and children following, he had made his way through the old stone gateway—the Crusaders' gate—into the Close. A steady stream of the best citizens was going with him. The very best, the Mayor and Councillors, Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff of the County, and the officer commanding the garrison, were grouped, a little aside, beyond the chains and pillars that guarded the lawn in front of the Bishop's Palace, waiting for the signal to form into a procession and enter the Cathedral, where clergy and assistants were already being marshalled for the Service of Thanksgiving. As Doughty Dormer passed before this congeries, he halted and lifted his hat, and spoke in clear, decisive tones :

“Mr. Mayor, I wish you a very successful day !”

The Mayor bowed : “Thank you, Mr. Dormer !” The Town Clerk nodded. The High Sheriff smiled. The Colonel and more than one of the Council noticed him. And without any second thought about it. There was a general sense that, quite unofficially, the Bank was being represented, as it should be, not in the municipal procession, or among the representatives of the Crown and Constitution, but well to the fore among the private citizens, who voluntarily attended this public occasion. That was the proper place for it, and Dormer's presence, and

JUBILEE

the word he put in, were just right. All that great weight of probity and responsibility that makes the real unwritten English Constitution was there, without being asked, much less forced ; and though not one of the Councillors or officials could have said, or wanted to say, as much in words, all felt that the more formal proceedings—for even in England one must have just a little formality—had received necessary and sufficient support.

Here came Doughty Dormer and family back to dinner, full of it all. Doughty Dormer, talking all the time, was retailing the names and qualities of all the personages who had spoken or nodded to him. His wife and daughter answered him with monosyllables only, carrying on all the time an aside, and to them far more entertaining, conversation about the school children. It might be the last revival of Mrs. Joseph Doughty's Quaker humanitarianism in the girl, but in the mother, who was of other blood, it was simply this new craze for improving the lower classes. The old man in his portrait was far more entertained by the boy :

“ Father,” he was saying, bright-eyed, “ I can still smell the gunpowder ! ”

Suddenly aware that he was without an audience, Doughty Dormer replied, with unwonted prophetic vision : “ Ah ! you'd soon get tired of that if you had much of it, I'll be bound ! ”

The boy was incredulous, but ran up the stairs two at a time, to his dinner. Our Mr. Dormer stared. Something uncanny, something perhaps not permitted save to old men who survive only in effigy, underlined the words. Gunpowder, explosion, disturbance of the almost preposterous peace and security that seemed to lie across that solid old house, over the Bank where all those tens of thousands of perfectly certain paper pounds were inscribed in the books, on this day of all the days of these sixty years ! Was it possible that anything could ever disturb it ?

Apparently not. The dining-room door closed upon a comfortable English family seated tranquilly over their midday meal, on this quasi-Sunday. It all looked as immutable as anything human can look.

Primitive man—and Our Mr. Dormer was very primitive—has but restricted means of speculation. Almost the only thing that appeals to him is a change in daily habit, but these changes appeal to him deeply. Stuck up there, with nothing to do but watch helplessly the thing he had made—oh, bitterness !—going on without him, changing in spite of him in ways he could not control and hardly comprehend, he cannot have escaped the change that had taken place in the most English, most middle-class, most Dormer of habits, the midday dinner. Although he had never seen his grandson and

JUBILEE

family seated in that upstairs dining-room that had been a little-used guest-room in his day, he knew well enough from the constant passage of things and people up and down the stairs below him, from the constant chatter that went on regardless of him. Up there, they sat round no heavy square old table, spread with a coarse durable cloth, some silver, but more pewter and plate ; some china, but more earthenware ; not the simple display to which he had been accustomed. The new dining-room had been the work of Doughty Dormer, more than any one. His wife had taken it as she found it. There was in it no trace of Pleasance, née Darcy, who had made her own only the drawing-room, the pleasant room at the corner, with its two windows on to Bishopgate, and two others on to Prospect Place. In her day the dinner had been served in the downstairs Parlour, long absorbed by the growing needs of the office. No, it was Doughty Dormer who ruled up there. It was a room darkened by the increasing height of the buildings that, continually spreading, covered the site of the garden. What did it matter ? You went to the dining-room to eat, didn't you, not to look at the view ? Hence the dubious pictures, "collected," not inherited or given, the huge sideboard, with its provision for endless pickles and innumerable decanters. Our Mr. Dormer and Stephen took spirits as medicine, or at night as cordials, wine upon occasion, but

with meals, beer. Early in the century no one thought of drinking water, and if one had, the danger to health might have deterred him. But Doughty Dormer had flourished in a later and better time. With more money, grander friends, a bigger position in the world, he had been the first Dormer to lay down a cellar. Not merely in what he drank did he propose to live well. But as regards eatables, while he proposed, others disposed. His wife, in caring for the welfare of the lower orders, could but divide that care into care for morals and care for health. That meant allowing the servants to attend their own religious services and take holidays that an earlier generation would have considered fantastic. So that while, on such an occasion as the Diamond Jubilee, Doughty Dormer had sherry and burgundy and port, he had a round of cold beef and apple tart, salad and Stilton to support it. What the abstemious and gentlemanly Stephen, the faintly aristocratic Pleasance would have thought of it, who shall say? Our Mr. Dormer would have considered it simply extravagant—a sign of how things had gone. Its effect was apparent enough. Doughty Dormer would take a nap of three-quarters of an hour, where his grandfather had been used to a meagre twenty minutes. Mrs. Doughty Dormer and her daughter went to sit in the drawing-room window and talk Progress. The boy went upstairs to stick some stamps in his album.

JUBILEE

But these diversions were a mere respite. There was more enjoyment afoot. The stands in the Market Place had been left and served to make a barrier to keep the crowd back for the principal attraction of the daylight festivities—nothing less than a captive balloon. Men had been busy unpacking it all dinner time—its inflation had been witnessed by an ever-increasing number of spectators, and by three o'clock those in charge of it pronounced it fit for public enjoyment.

Here came Doughty Dormer, therefore, once again descending below the portrait, with wife and children following him in true Victorian duck-like fashion. He expatiated on the opportunity, one not to be lost.

Out there in the Market Place the crowd was dense and enthusiastic, but there was a curious reluctance to pay half-a-crown for the privilege of making that perilous voyage "as high as the Cathedral spire," as the "aeronaut" was giving it out. Two or three young men, full of the spirit of adventure, and perhaps of beer, having "dared" each other, stood inside the roped enclosure, giggling slightly, and the butt of the wit of all their acquaintance. Doughty Dormer made no bones about the business. His predominant quality—self-assurance—showed itself to perfection. He had no feelings of shyness in front of that crowd. Though far from the richest or most conspicuous of the citizens, he

had, from his position in the Bank, the best-known face and figure for many a mile. He had no fear of the unaccustomed elevation. Unimaginative, he probably did not realise it. But even had he done so, he would not have been frightened. He had had thirty years and more of railways that ran to time, with a safety practically perfect—steamers that crossed the Channel as though it were a crossing of the road, epidemics that could be dealt with, crises that could be avoided, and were always forestalled. He took it for granted that the balloon was safe, the balloonist infallible. As was usual during his long prosperous life, he was perfectly right. Had he been questioned as to his reasons for his confidence, he would have stated them in his high, resounding voice : “ Safe ! of course it ’s safe ! They daren’t take the public’s money if it weren’t ! ”

That was precisely what the promoters of the experiment thought. They did not want one or two adventurous individuals. They wanted number and quality. As Doughty Dormer, his family following close on his coat-tails, elbowed and “ by-your-leave ” ’d his way to the turnstile, it was opened for him. He threw down half-a-sovereign, loudly demanding four tickets. They were produced, and he and his were ushered up the carpeted steps into the basket with smiles and bows. The public began to form a queue. What was good for Doughty Dormer—Mister

JUBILEE

Dormer, up-at-the-Bank—better known nowadays than his employer, was good enough for Easthampton. More, most of Easthampton thought it jolly good. Who had ever followed the Dormers and the Bank and come to harm? The basket filled. The balloonist gave the signal. The steps were removed, the man at the steam winch put over his lever, and the balloon began to rise.

The crowd stared at the steady dignified motion, at the bottom of the basket, getting imperceptibly smaller, at the top-hatted or sailor-hatted heads, dotted along the rim, at the smooth magenta bulk of the envelope. From the throats of all those tilted, staring faces came a long “O-o-oah !” At that instant a small but vigorous orchestra, violin, cornet, trombone and double-bass, hired by the promoters to garnish the proceedings, struck up one of Sousa’s marches. It was a great moment, and became immortalised in the catchword that held the music-halls and smoking-rooms of England for half a decade : “Then the band played and the balloon went up !”

Inside the basket, Doughty Dormer was experiencing those pleasurable emotions that seemed to follow him through life. Pointing with extended finger, he named the main buildings and principal streets of the city as they came into view, and then flattened themselves, as though pressed down by some invisible

agency, into the pattern of the old mediæval walled town that Easthampton had been, with its now ample fringes of Victorian suburbs. His wife and daughter, not actually engrossed in visual geography, knew that it was now rather fashionable for women to take an intelligent interest in miscellaneous knowledge, and followed his indications. It was the boy who brought them back to actuality. Standing upon his seat, and holding by the stay-ropes, he leaned over and caught a glimpse of that tremendous depth below his feet, that made the crowd in the Market Place, and the Market Place itself, look no more than so much ink spilled upon a blotter. He gave one gasp and sat down, looking green. Doughty Dormer called to the balloonist :

“ We ’re high enough, ain’t we ? ” It was not much. It was enough. The man signalled, the steam winch was reversed, and down to earth the balloon sank, as majestically as it had risen.

Long before they reached the ground the boy had forgotten his momentary dizziness, and was asking his father questions. Doughty Dormer replied in his authoritative, offhand voice. He did not show any agitation. Perhaps he had not felt any qualm. It had been so instinctive, his decision, his voicing of that decision, in the face of risk, that it can hardly have presented itself to his mind in any concrete form. Not only had he been brought up and trained in business to avoid risk ; it was an instinct, born

with him, inherited from two generations. He had obeyed it mechanically.

When the balloon was safely grounded and secured, he led his family out, down the steps, and away to the turnstile. The promoters of the entertainment seemed loath to let him go. He had been an advertisement, and they bowed him out with no little ceremony. But in that short time the fact that he had made the ascent had got surprisingly abroad. All sorts of minor personalities, factory cashiers and chief clerks, shopkeepers, and the smaller business community, to whom he was the person whose ear it was necessary to obtain, in order to be heard by the Bank, had gathered, each anxious to show, to him, to themselves, and to all the world, that they were his intimates, approved his daring, his initiative, his public spirit. For it was felt he had done a remarkable thing, set a fashion, given an example. There was even weightier approbation. One or two better-known figures, drawn there by curiosity, the landlord of the George, the Superintendent of Police, and one of those retired merchant skippers who are to be found in every town like Easthampton, encouraging the athletics and deprecating the politics of the community, drew about him, flattered his womenfolk, and patronised his son.

Doughty Dormer bore his honours meekly, as he elbowed his way out of the crowd, that closed behind him, besieging the turnstile,

clamouring to get to the balloon. It was characteristic of him that his meekness rested upon the fact that he felt he had deserved praise. He always did the right thing, always had. People recognised it. They always did. There was, therefore, no need for him to prate about it, to advertise himself. He was what they took him for—not the figure-head—richer and more exalted men might be that if they liked—but the practical leader of the business life of a business town of the greatest business Empire that ever had been. If people added “or ever will be,” Doughty Dormer bowed slightly, on behalf of self, Queen and Empire. He did not feel the statement to be extravagant. Least of all on that particular day, the crowning day of the greatest business Empire, etc.

Having, as it were, shown himself, lent his visible encouragement to the public rejoicings, what could be more fitting than that he should take a little private enjoyment in the bosom of his family? Nothing could be more fitting. Doughty Dormer, always considerate of himself, would give himself a little treat. He had honestly earned it. On certain occasions he had had holidays of some length, had even made a short tour on the Continent, but with advancing years he stuck closer and closer to business, taking only a brief ten days at Brighton in the spring, and another ten at Scarborough in the autumn. He had that supreme advantage of

JUBILEE

his kind, one of the things that stupefied and enraged foreigners and got Doughty Dormer's country called "perfidious Albion"—he knew instinctively how to sacrifice himself in a manner highly becoming and pleasant to himself. The real secret of his brief holidays was that he did not think the Bank, and incidentally the town, could really get on without him, and as he never gave them the chance, he was never undeceived.

How just and how right, then, that he should treat himself to—the extravagant delight of a drive in the landau hired from the George, with his wife and children. Who could say he was wasteful or dissolute? No one. There it stood, at the house door of the Bank in Middens Alley, the hired landau that was to be seen at every self-respecting wedding in the town. For if, in some ways, Easthampton had gone forward, and become the modern manufacturing town, it had, in the matter of transport, remained early Victorian. And what a sense of spacious, unhurried comfort there was on those sun-warmed black cushions, behind the coachman (known to the whole world as "Cheese") in his Stilton-coloured, Stilton-smelling overcoat, seedy topper, and concertina leggings, and the big, slow, safe, orange-mahogany, odorous horse. After a word or two of instructions for the servants, they got in, Doughty Dormer and his wife facing forward, the children backward; the driver twirled his

whip and chirruped, the old horse lifted first one leg and then another. They were off.

Years after, in many a more efficient vehicle, young Dormer looked back to the utter bliss of that hot June afternoon ; the slow, regular motion ; the confident, authoritative voices of the parents ; the glare, the smell, the Peace. They went down Bishopgate, which, just below the Bank, lost its character of principal street and dwindled out amid staid old houses, inhabited by the older-established lawyers and doctors under the shadow of the wall of the Cathedral Close.

Progress had actually confirmed the silent stagnation of this quarter of the town, for the new causeway to the station had diverted all the modern traffic into a separate parallel stream. Thus they came to the old bridge, and the steep hill up to the Quakers' burial-ground, where Doughty Dormer, by habit, raised himself from his seat to give an approving nod. The place was well kept, and showed "breeding," as it were, the cumulative care of a century of Doughtys and Dormers and their like.

Instead of dipping straight down into Eastwick, the landau bore to the left along what had been a mere lane, until the Borough Council during a severe winter had made it, by Unemployed Relief Work, a very fair carriage road, joining the Moor Hall road, on a stretch of typical East Coast heathland.

JUBILEE

Doughty Dormer expatiated on the beauties of the Borough Council, as compared with the corrupt and ridiculous Corporation that had preceded it, until at his direction the course was turned southward, down a leafy lane, that brought them into the Seaton road, at the end of Eastwick Street, just beyond the Old Rectory, as it was now called. It was, perhaps, a fitting drive for Doughty Dormer to take. It was the scene of one of his triumphs, a triumph peculiarly his. His grandfather and father had administered the property. His mother had been born there, his parents had both died there. And what had he done? Without any pretension to culture, and scorning art as doubtful sense, and still more dubious morality, he had scented the growing demand for the antique, the picturesque, above all, for the Georgian. Other eras could be antique and picturesque, but uncomfortable. Retired people, whether they had made money in business or earned a pension in India, wanted the antique and the picturesque plus ventilation without draughts, and sanitation without visible pipes and varnish. Doughty Dormer gave them what they wanted. He built a bungalow, of the sort described in auctioneers' advertisements as "handy," on the spot where his father, courting his mother, had leapt over the garden fence. He sold it, with sufficient of the garden, and then sold the Rectory, with the remainder of the land.

OUR MR. DORMER

He made a nice price and was justified in pointing out what he had done to his children. They did not understand, but that did not matter.

As they drove home through the midsummer twilight he had every reason to feel himself a happy man, in the enjoyment of a suitable and well-earned reward. His wife, who was already full of other interests, his children, who were critical of him as all children of their generation, could but respond to his naive cheerfulness. Loud and self-centred his speech might be, complacent and cocksure his thought, but there was no malice or subtlety in him. The very stratagems of which he boasted, by which he had brought off this or that stroke of business, were transparent. And when they descended at the house door, and he said : " There, you have enjoyed yourselves, haven't you ? " all responded warmly : " Yes, thank you, very much ! " It was so obvious that he enjoyed their enjoyment, and genuinely wished to share his happiness with all of them.

As they trooped upstairs, Our Mr. Dormer was staring from his portrait as usual. What he thought of things, no one knew, no one enquired. They all sat down to cold supper, for there was yet more pleasure to be squeezed out of that day of all days. There was still the display of fireworks, and the bonfire. From this enjoyment was derived inversely to age, in

JUBILEE

the family. The boy delighted, the womenfolk were tolerant, Doughty Dormer himself had been opposed to the Council voting money for such an object, but had consented to have a look after all.

The leads of the old house were considerable and easy of access from one of the attic windows. The servants had been duly instructed to carry up mats, wicker-chairs and cushions, as soon as a dry night was reasonably certain ; and as darkness fell, the whole family settled down between the two monumental chimney-stacks that, ten pots to a stack, gave vent to the complicated flues of the old house.

The night was fine, cool, and desirably dark for the event. It was not long before the first rockets flew hissing and glittering into the air, from the railed-off mounds of Castle Ditches, where the pyrotechnists were installed. The boy was delirious with pleasure. Since the *feu de joie* of the morning, nothing had given him such acute enjoyment as this. When rockets were succeeded by a sea of green fire, that presently turned red, showing the gnarled remains of the old castle, like the decayed and petrified teeth of some prehistoric beast, even the fastidious Mrs. Dormer, and her progressive daughter, could but murmur in admiration. When the coloured lights gave place to green, red and yellow globes that shot up into the air, and hung like bunches of miraculous grapes in

OUR MR. DORMER

the sombre stillness of the summer night, Doughty Dormer himself admitted : “ ’Pon me soul, it ’s very ingenious ! ”

To tell the truth, he was beginning to feel a little fatigued. No longer young, never careful of himself, he had had an exciting day, and this display was hardly the thing to end upon. Yet he sat on, feeling a little chilly, as the lines and stars and wheels danced before him, making his eyes water, while his ears throbbed with the explosions and the fumes tickled his throat.

The bonfire twinkled, glowed, then roared and shone. It also smelt. It was not ingenious. It struck him as wasteful. But it was all part of the show. Even after the ladies had retired, finding it dull and dirty up there, he sat on to please his son. He was growing a little conscious that the bliss had worn thin somewhere, and the only thing he could think of was those South African mines, in which he had invested a good proportion of his now considerable private capital. Business was good, the Queen’s reign had been remarkable, he himself was, and deserved to be fortunate. But on that particular night he felt for the first time not so much alarm as malaise, as if the bonfire were a little too much for him, the sixty years of Peace and Prosperity thus celebrated a little too good to last, his own confident well-being the least thing on the heavy side.

In this frame of mind he descended into the

JUBILEE

house again, turned down the gas jet in the stone hall to a blue bubble that made Our Mr. Dormer mysterious and awful, so that the boy could not look at him but called to his father "good night," and clambered up to his bedroom in the little landing over the door.

* * *

Doughty Dormer went to bed. It was one of the refinements introduced by Mrs. Dormer that he occupied the dressing-room. As ever, he had hardly wound his watch ere he was fast asleep. Contrary to habit, he dreamed. After much that was confused, he found himself addressing the City Council, who were seated on the golden trails left by the rockets in the sky. This did not appear odd. He felt he had something to say to them ; the extraordinary part of it all was that he couldn't remember what it was. But it came to him gradually. He wanted to complain of the noise they were making with their feet. It seemed curious that stamping on the sky should produce the sound, but——

He was awake and sitting up in bed. The door of the room shook under a salvo of frenzied knocks. The voice of his son called him : " Father ! Father ! "

He jumped out of bed, pulled on trousers and a pilot coat that hung behind his door, and opened :

OUR MR. DORMER

“What’s all this?”

There was no need to ask. The landing at the head of the stairs was lighted by a lurid glare. It came from the big window above the house door, which looked across Middens Alley, at the back of the George Hotel. It was from the yard of this latter that the light and the noise came. There was no doubt. It was a fire, and a bad one.

Up on the wall Our Mr. Dormer stared. On the landing, with short linen nightshirt showing bare feet, the boy stared. Neither of them, with their immensely different experience of Doughty Dormer, had ever seen him as they saw him now. Had he been capable of it, he might have stared at himself. For never in his life, which was becoming a long one, had he been faced with immediate risk of physical violence; never felt that particular awe which strikes into the human heart confronted by the “elements”—earthquake, tempest, flood, or fire; never felt that helplessness—for what can two human hands do against that which is more than human?

On the whole, his demeanour was creditable. He turned and hastened up the narrow stairs to the attics, unfastened the top window and got out on to the leads, closely followed by his son. There, with his coat drooping over his shoulders, insufficiently covered with the thin shirt, his half-braced trousers bagging round his ankles,

JUBILEE

he took stock of the situation. He was at home with facts, and soon got over the first creepy, incredulous stage of darkness and fright and surprise.

The George was an old, old house, dating from the first years of comparative peace after the Wars of the Roses. It had finely vaulted stone cellars, to remind the curious that, like most important inns, it sprang from the monkish hospitality to pilgrim or scholar. Growing traffic had extended it from the Market Place right back to Middens Alley, and the main building was Georgian, solid brick. Both ends of the yard had been rebuilt in more recent times. Then had come railways and the decay of the inns, so that the rest of the building was still timber and plaster under thatch, eking out a living by its job-mastering and its bar, a perfect rat-run of old passages, stables and big rooms "let" for auctions or storage, intricate, insanitary and inflammable. Who should know better than Doughty Dormer? Had he not described it as such to the landlord, when obtaining the insurance? The north side of the yard was well alight. Beneath the noise of the burning and the murmur of a growing crowd could be heard the scuffling of the frightened horses that half-dressed men were leading out. As he looked, Doughty Dormer could feel the night breeze full in his face. The whole block east of the Market might burn, but he would

OUR MR. DORMER

see to it that the fire should not cross Middens Alley.

His mind was made up in a moment. The spectacle, as such, left him cold. The irony of this climax to the day's celebrations was invisible to him. A true Dormer now, his thought was for the safety of the Bank. Above him, the soft darkness of the summer night gazed down inscrutable. More human, but still titanic, the three-hundred-foot spire of the old Cathedral called out of the darkness by the glare, stood remote, impassive, spectator of this scene in the town's history as of all the scenes that had been enacted those hundreds of years. Could Doughty Dormer but have stood aside from himself, he might have known how little and insignificant he looked, a human figure dwarfed by Time and Eternity. But Doughty Dormer was something more interesting still. He could not get outside himself. He had the restless preoccupation of a Victorian Englishman. He had no use for speculation. He had even less for idleness. He must be doing. Above all, he must be doing now, for the Bank, in which he had been bred and born, brought up and trained, in which he had worked until he could not imagine himself apart from it, was in danger.

Immutable, the night sky and the old church pointing towards it, saw him galvanised into motion, shuffling indoors and downstairs. If they gazed on unmoved, one at least there was

JUBILEE

who responded to his purposeful energy. His son had been watching with all that new critical attitude of children toward their parents, and ran beside him, admiring, reassured. Stopping only to pull up his trousers and put on a muffler and the inevitable hat without which he never left the house, Doughty Dormer armed himself with the keys that hung by his bed and descended the stairs.

Out in Middens Alley it was light as day and nearly as busy. From what quarter he could not imagine, people whom Doughty Dormer had never seen before, had gathered into the beginnings of a crowd, and gazed, detached, ominous, as if there might be something to be made out of all this. In those days Doughty Dormer still felt that he knew every one that was any one in Easthampton. Already this confidence was in part illusory, for big London or Midland or Northern stores were opening branches in Easthampton, on sites which had been the shops of natives bred and born, and there was, of course, a regular factory population, nearly all grown up or come in from the country in his lifetime, whom he did not and could not know. But his belief was as yet unshaken, and these strange faces and figures, on this strange occasion, in that familiar lane beside which he had been born, combined with the discomfort of an aging man hastily aroused by the unaccustomed, and with something else, more than the fatigues and

OUR MR. DORMER

excitement of the day, some foreboding—to alarm him thoroughly. He stood beside the grey-moustached inspector of police, who was standing over one of his men, inexperienced at passing the collar of the hydrant over the feed of what they dignified by the name of the “auxiliary” engine. Doughty Dormer knew well enough that it was simply an old manual, brought out to do what it could, while the town’s one steamer was employed at the other front of the George, in the Market Place. And with every moment the roar and crackle of the fire, the crowd about the yard, and the alarm in Doughty Dormer’s heart grew and grew.

Along the lane, each side of George Yard, men and women were coming half-clothed, half-awakened, half-sensible, out of their houses, bringing all sorts of useless or unnecessary objects, snatched up in the panic of the moment. But once outside, they seemed to hesitate to move far away, fascinated by the intimacy of the house that to them represented home, repelled by the publicity of the street, which they never invaded after midnight, and which was everybody’s, not theirs. So they stood, clutching articles of clothing, account books, bits of small finery, and doing nothing, absolutely nothing.

Doughty Dormer groaned to himself. All this mob ought to be doing something. It hurt his sense of regularity and industry, trained for a lifetime in the Bank, where everything that

JUBILEE

came in during the day was dealt with before the books were put away, by unceasing, ordered application. Now they were actually trying the old manual. Some half-dozen fellows each side were working upon the bars in rhythm, and a weakish jet was being thrown a few feet into the air. Much too short to reach the fire, it hardly arched over the big doors of the yard. No one seemed to know what to do. Victims and spectators gazed and murmured, the inspector was talking to the sergeant, and the roadway was running with almost as much water as was being thrown in the direction of the fire by the leaky hose and outdated engine.

Doughty Dormer could stand it no longer. To do, do something, no matter what, had become with him a paramount necessity. Moving in what was for him a very quiet and circumspect way, he drew near the inspector, nudged him, and motioned toward the Bank House. The inspector looked up :

“ Hey, Mr. Dormer. All right ! ”

Professional discretion knew better than to argue in the street. Rubber-soled and taciturn, the inspector slipped inside the heavy door and drew it close, behind Doughty Dormer, quietly.

Once inside, and on his own ground, Doughty Dormer's daily habit of life returned, and his anxiety escaped him. He shouted at the top of his voice :

OUR MR. DORMER

“ Up there ! Bring down the Madeira and two glasses ! ”

He knew his people. His wife and daughter had kept their dignity—and their rooms. But the maids, between curiosity and fear, were huddled half-clothed, giggling and “ law-ing,” against the stairhead. At his stentorian, masterful tone, they disappeared in a flutter and came trooping down, one bearing the decanter, another the tray with glasses. Doughty Dormer had moved with the times, but he had not moved as fast as they. He still considered Madeira the stuff for an emergency, not whisky.

“ Glass of wine, Inspector ! ”

“ Thank ye, Mr. Dormer. Shan’t need any light to drink it by ! ”

It was true. The old hall was light enough. The glasses shone, the wine gleamed in the orange glow from the window above. Dark as Madeira, with a Madeira look of stored and mellowed strength, Our Mr. Dormer, up there on the wall, surveyed the scene. But Doughty Dormer had no eyes for the portrait. His mind, with a rodent’s fear of being caught, was ferreting a way out. He, Doughty Dormer, was not there to drink wine in the middle of the night. He hardly gave the inspector time to get the flavour of the first gulp :

“ You ’ll get this in hand soon, I suppose ? ”

“ Lord, yes, Mr. Dormer ! ”

Merely official confidence ; that was evident.

JUBILEE

"You realise the seriousness of the situation?"

"It's a bad fire, but I remember——"

"Is it likely to spread farther this way?"

"I couldn't say, the wind lies right down the yard!"

"You've no more men, and can get no other engines?"

"Why, wherever'd we go? You can't ask Seaton to come twenty mile. As for men, we've plenty of help. Every one'll volunteer."

"That's just what I don't like. This crowd. There's no telling what they may do."

"We'll keep an eye on 'em."

"Yes, but can you do that and fight the fire too?"

"Don't you worry, Mr. Dormer. Thank ye, sir!"

Doughty Dormer filled the glasses again and drew himself up. In spite of deshabelle his seriousness had a dignity.

"You understand, the Bank MUST NOT BURN."

"I don't think there's much risk."

An exclamation from above, a crash outside, and the reflection became brighter, more agitated, and descended lower on the stairs.

"Inspector, there mustn't be ANY risk. We can't turn out the safe and deed room, like the people opposite who turn out their cottages. Something must be done!"

"My word, Mr. Dormer, what d'you think——"

Doughty Dormer brushed it all aside. He had come to recognise the police as part of the established order, a respectable and progressive institution, in a way that his father and grandfather never had. But he was English. The official in uniform might flatter, but could not convince him.

"The Chief Constable's in the Market with the steamer?"

"Yes."

"You go and get him to bring it round here."

The inspector didn't like it, that was visible. It was rank interference. But over his rough membranes, accustomed to the gross caress of old ale, or, on special occasions, hot rum, the Madeira was trickling, with its divine persuasion.

"Very well," he replied, putting on his peaked cap.

Outside, however, matters had not stood still. After the big brown, the old white, and the two or three cart horses on which the decayed job-mastering business of the George was founded, had been got out, the odd-job man who looked after them, having seen them housed in the stable where the grocer kept his carts, in Castle Ditches, had come back, with the obscurely rooted faithfulness of his kind, and swung to the rickety old yard doors. While Doughty Dormer and the inspector had been absent those few moments, the sergeant, from a mixture of common-sense and desire for

JUBILEE

promotion, had conceived the idea of opening the doors and pushing the manual as far up the yard as might be possible, so that perchance its effect on the fire could be judged.

Like all such simple ideas, the results were beyond expectation. The crazy old doors, warped it may be by heat and water, and in any case lacking repair and kind usage for half a century, stuck. Willing shoulders forced them, at the sergeant's word, with such enthusiasm that the right-hand half flew right back, dragging its hinges from the rotten post and falling with a crash of broken glass and splintered shutters against the building behind. This again need not have mattered at such a moment, had not the word immediately gone round, with that telepathic swiftness that soon invests the most prosaic of even English crowds under such conditions, that the window of the "tap," the miserable little sub-bar by which the George eked out the meagre profits of such a place in the 'nineties, was broken.

The sergeant and his men were busy replacing the short-length feed of the engine by a longer one, so that they might move the antiquated machine, the inspector was sending a message to his Chief, when there was a murmur, a rush and a scramble, and the end of the yard was full of a joking, jostling crowd, pushing about in the light of the blazing main building, fifty yards away.

OUR MR. DORMER

“ Here, I say,” called the sergeant, “ I never thought——”

There was no doubt what was toward. The place was as light as day, and uncomfortably hot, but men, and even women, were helping each other, with shouts and laughter, and some one from within the broken window was tossing out bottles of beer, that were seized, decapitated on the stones, and emptied in an unceasing stream.

The sergeant now saw promotion replaced by a severe reprimand, for no one was more versed than he in the ill-humour of a townsman whose property has been invaded, and most of all by direct action of the police. He saw himself before an inquiry, fatal to any one of his rank and kind, for at such he must be sacrificed for the credit of the force. Gathering his men with a gruff word of command, he launched himself and posse, head foremost, elbows and shoulders boring, into the crowd, collared the dispenser of stolen liquids and flung him out upon the cobbles.

So far so good ; the head of the crowd, unprepared, occupied in not missing any beer and weakened by the obscure sense of guilt of the poorer Englishman, confronted by the Law, melted away. But there were plenty more behind, unbruised and thirsty, who more than all had missed the reward the boldest had secured. These disappointed ones did not take

JUBILEE

more than a moment to realise that there were only five constables and the sergeant ; an ominous growl ran along the lane, big stones began to fly, and with a sudden surge the gateway was full of struggling figures, outlined against the fire.

To Doughty Dormer the whole affair was one long agony of alarm. As though these unfamiliar happenings at this unusual hour were not grotesque travesty enough of Middens Alley, that respectable lane along which he walked every day of his life, there was his major pre-occupation. No one was doing anything. It was hard enough to swallow the look, the sound, the very smell of an angry crowd. He had never seen such a thing in all his life, and every second of clamour and violence and stench outraged the quietude of his Dormer mind.

But behind that was the sinister, inhuman threat of that great column of ignition, that riveted his attention, and dominated his instincts. Buffeted, trodden on, squeezed, he dragged himself with difficulty on to the broad steps of the Bank door and stood panting.

Then came relief. There was a rumble and a shout and incessant ringing of a bell. The abuse from the crowd, the stone-throwing, the hustling, stopped ; the steady arm-in-arm shoving of the police stopped also. Between the two came the new brass-boilered steamer-engine, with its real brass-helmeted firemen, and

OUR MR. DORMER

right on the front, Whitcombe, the new Chief Constable, younger than his inspectors, all out to make a good job of this, as he had of the processions and ceremonies. He leapt down, and the glittering machine was backed up the yard, which the police managed to close with the mangled doors, only leaving room for the feed-pipe. The crowd, nonplussed, pressed murmuring against the barricade.

Doughty Dormer had time to reflect, and the first thing that occurred to him was that he was chilled from the ankles upwards. His feet were soaking wet. He turned, and went into the house, amazed to find the door perceptibly warm to his touch.

Inside, as ever, Peace, Security, Property intact. Very quiet, darker than outside, above all nothing changed. Why, here was the boy curled up asleep, on the stair ! Stirring him with his foot, the father commanded :

“ Come, get you to bed ! ” and at some sleepy expostulation : “ Come, get along ! ”

Upstairs, as he went to change his clothes, his wife’s voice, cool and low, from her half-opened door :

“ Is there anything one ought to do ? ”

“ Nothing. If there is, I ’ll let you know.”

“ What about the homeless ? ”

“ I don’t know. In any case, we can’t have them here.”

The door was gently closed.

JUBILEE

He was in two minds as to whether he would undress and go back to bed. But the years of perfect security had done their work. Until that essential condition of life had been restored, he could not rest. So he thought he would change, dress fully, and go down to the dining-room. A nice Parmesan cheese biscuit and a drop of brandy and water would comfort and compose him. He halted on the broad landing, however. Surely the rumour from the street was growing again ! He went to the window over the stairs. The panes were hot. Peering down squint-wise, he could see nothing at first but a dark swirling mass, where the wall of the George yard cut off the light of the fire, that shone in his eyes at his higher level. Then he made out a regular *mêlée*, police and crowd all mixed up. His alarm returned in a moment. He was down and out into the street, and circling the scrimmage, which appeared to centre about the water hydrant, contrived to squeeze up to Whitcombe, who was filling the gap in the yard door with his bulk, and passing his men through into the lane.

“ What ’s wrong now, Whitcombe ? ”

“ Is that you, Mr. Dormer ? Rough crowd, cut the hose ! ”

“ Can you mend it ? ”

“ Yes, but I shall have to clear the Alley, or they ’ll cut it again.”

“ Your men are equal to it ? ”

OUR MR. DORMER

“ Well—they ’ve been on their feet all day.”

It was clear enough what was going on. The thought of free beer, withheld from them, had stirred all the deepest instincts of the East-hampton crowd, so rarely pugnacious. The police bent over the hose, and shoved from behind, could not bind the spouting leak, shoved back, and were shoved, and the whole mass of humanity swayed back and forward. At that moment there was a roar and a shower of sparks. Dormer and Whitcombe turned to look. The Georgian main building, long a mass of flame, had ignited the ancient stabling. It had been smouldering along the thatch, until a fireman cut away the old wooden gutter. A great layer of thatch fell with it, and the air getting to the glowing straw, sent it up in a column of flame. Below, the upturned faces of the helpless firemen, around the dribbling engine, looked puny and white.

Whitcombe cursed under his breath. On Doughty Dormer the effect was far other. He had lived, that night, through centuries of new experience, had seen things he had never dreamed of seeing. But he was, like any other human creature, the product of all sorts of habits and situations, accidents and plans of those who had produced him. Something there was rooted in him too deep to be broken down by the sudden panic of the nightmare hours he had passed. All that was most rooted in him, most Dormer,

JUBILEE

most Bank-nurtured, rose up to instant action. Security, perfect security, was the watchword by which his life had been guarded. He would not forget it now. Pushing his way around the outskirts of the crowd, mere spectators stupidly staring at the endless brawl going on between the more active malcontents and the police, he let himself in, once more, at the big door. But not to go upstairs. Fumbling with the keys in the orange twilight, he passed along the passage that had once led to Mrs. Benders' kitchen, but which now communicated with all sorts of subsidiary departments, in one of which had just been installed a telephone. He had opposed the innovation and been overruled. Now he found an astonishing comfort in the presence of it, and in the new electric light that shone so bright at the touch of a button ; no fumbling with matches, no danger of a naked flame, no flicker, no fumes. The telephone, it is true, was in its infancy in Easthampton, the novel experiment of a local company. The machine which comforted Doughty Dormer was nearly as big as an eight-day clock, had a separate call-key, and a trigger receiver. Moreover, there was only the most perfunctory night attendance. Nevertheless, after some minutes of holding down the key and exclaiming " Are you there ? " in the astonished silence of the empty office, he got a reply, was put through to the Guard Room at the barracks, and anxiously asked for help to

put out a dangerous fire and to control an awkward crowd, giving his name, and mentioning that of the Major commanding the Depot, to whom he had been of no little service in business matters. He got a curt acknowledgment, and the connection was severed. He gingerly replaced the unaccustomed machine, and resigned himself to wait. But he was not of the temperament to remain patient behind the scenes. He was soon at the big window over the stairs.

The light of the flames danced so, that he opened the window and put his hands on the warm sill. There rose up in his nostrils the choking smoke, that coated throat and lungs, made his eyes smart. A nasty smell at any time, the smell of burning, a smell of destruction and wastage. But to such a product of civilisation (and such a civilisation) as Doughty Dormer, it was the very fumes of Hell. For the first time in his life he saw hanging over him a threat against which he had no sure protection. The fact that the fire was an impersonal affair, something that no one had actually done, that had begun no one knew how, made it, to his materialistic mind, all the more horrible. His was not the temperament nor the education to see in such a visitation the chastening hand of inscrutable wisdom. Named after the Doughtys, he had never come in contact with the elder generation's daily piety or lofty speculation. He had drifted

JUBILEE

out of a child's habit of chapel-going into a man's mere observance of the Established Church. Now, faced with the possible annihilation of all that most belonged to him—or that he most belonged to, for no one could measure the disaster that must attend the burning out of the Bank—the easy-going acceptance of Providence that had all his life so amply provided for him, collapsed in a moment. To call it the “act of God” never occurred to him, and would not have comforted him. He had never waited for God to act. No! Crude superstitions that had not entered his mind for years, thronged its emptiness. The fire seemed a deliberate act of malice on the part of some personal Devil, aimed at Doughty Dormer, with the selective vindictiveness of all demons. Down below, this crowd that brawled and helped the fire, looked, from where he leaned out, like small attendant demons dancing some Dance of Death over all that he had ever striven and hoped for. Look at that great column of flame, white at the heart, yellow in its fringe, sending its red reflection right across the night sky.

“Did you ever see anything like it!” one of Doughty Dormer's habitual expostulations, sprang to his lips. But even he felt it to be incongruous. No one could possibly have seen or imagined such a thing. The site of that awful portent was George Yard, through which he had scampered as a schoolboy, lounged as an

adolescent, briskly stridden as a rising bank manager ; the short-cut from the Bank, station and river to the Market Place ; the very centre of Easthampton. That it should be so consumed was preposterous. And to Doughty Dormer the preposterous was terrible. He had neither philosophy nor humour to transmute it. But that Destruction should touch the Bank, that was worse than preposterous. He did not know what it was ! And then, as little, human, pathetic in his impotence, he gazed at the visitation and the calm sky beyond that heeded not his agony, he heard a sound. Yes, unmistakable : the rhythm of hard boots on the cobbles, as down from Castle Ditches, where the crowd was thinnest, there came at the double, in shirt-sleeves and trousers, forage-capped and grinning, the soldiers from the barracks. A word from Whitcombe to the officer, and they had linked arms and started shoving the crowd back from the hydrant and the hose, forming a cordon across the Alley and sweeping all before them. And did the crowd mishandle them as the police had been mishandled ? Not a bit of it ! The crowd began to cheer !

Doughty Dormer was not of a generation that believed in miracles. But there was in his face at that moment something that was more related to the emotional experiences of the Bible than to anything that had happened in his daily life. For that great evil that had overhung him and all

JUBILEE

that he felt to be his, had been exorcised. The uplifted hands had been turned away, not by those beneficent powers to whom prayer was habitually made. It was he, Doughty Dormer, who had frustrated the implacability of Destiny. See, down there, Whitcombe and his men, no longer baited, had soon got the hose mended or replaced ; and now the crowd cheered with redoubled vigour, standing docile behind the grinning, careless line of the soldiers, as others of their number handled lengths of hose and helped shove the steamer as far up the yard as the heat could be borne. Now the inspector had taken the nozzle from the fireman and directed a strong jet of water, keen and effective as a knife, on the hissing ruin of the stables, cutting the flame from beam and rafter as peel is shaved from fruit, reducing the triumphant might of the fire by great slices, from a towering golden tree to a crumbling, steaming heap of dull red embers. But Doughty Dormer's blood was up ; he now desired to see the whole of the danger stamped out as quickly as it had arisen. From where he stood he commanded a view that the inspector with his hose could not possibly have, and as the fire perceptibly dwindled, he was able to form some idea of the general situation. The big Georgian main building on the north side of the yard had burnt out, and its high walls, standing, had contained the fire in the direction of the Market Place. At the other

end of the yard, behind the tap, were some old, old cellars and lofts, actually stone-built survivals of the original monastic guest-house, which, tiled and very solid, were intact. Between the two were the blazing stables, now in process of being subdued. But at some time or other in the history of the complicated and various rebuildings and alterations of the place, someone forgotten, for some reason none now might divine, had put up a great old chimney-stack at the back of these stables. There it towered, alone, for the whole of the thatched roof and dry old rafters had fallen, but had left, about the neck of it, where it tapered, a collar of smouldering, now red, now faintly yellow thatch, hanging so gingerly that a breath of wind, or its own gradual consumption, might send it over the wall on to the backs of the shops along Bishopgate, and start all the trouble anew. Why didn't the inspector play on it? Ah! Doughty Dormer, his imagination keyed up to an unwonted pitch, thought he knew why. The front of the stables, bricked around the doorway, stood sufficiently high to prevent a clear view of the chimney-stack from the ground of the yard.

Down went Doughty Dormer, his head hanging from weariness and anxiety and unaccustomed effort, his feet cold and wet again, his hand shaking, but intent, so that no physical disability could stay him from stretching out his puny human power to arrest remorseless fate.

JUBILEE

Out in Middens Alley now everything that had been confusion and dismay was ordered and successful energy. Soldiers were holding the crowd back with easy jocular fraternity, police were assuring the service of their engine, the few immediate inhabitants who had not been sent to their homes, were being employed in sweeping up the broken glass and littered sticks and stones of the scuffle with the police.

The sergeant from the barracks and the sergeant of police looked keenly at the queer figure Doughty Dormer cut (semi-dressed and dishevelled), but perceiving him to be a gentleman, they did not question him, and were satisfied to see him go across to where the officer was chatting with Whitcombe against the broken gateway.

The two centurions received him with a mixture of indulgence and incredulity. Neither the army nor the police were inclined to admit that a mere civilian could see anything that they could not see. But he was very urgent with them, and he was Mister Dormer of the Bank ; and being, after all, servants of the system that he upheld, however obscurely they felt it, they must perforce show him consideration. The officer stayed with his men, but Whitcombe led with his long, assured stride down the yard, between pools of water and smouldering beams, to where the firemen stood about the engine, or satisfied themselves that the fire was making no

OUR MR. DORMER

fresh outbreak. Beyond that the heat was still tremendous, and Whitcombe waved Doughty Dormer back, while he spoke to the inspector.

The scene which followed had a marked effect on the rest of Doughty Dormer's life. It was as though the catastrophic element in human affairs, which he had always denied and successfully avoided, now, as he outwitted its fiercest demonstration, seemed to make one last desperate lunge at him. The inspector shifted his ground slightly, altered the direction of the nozzle, and threw the steely jet of water through a gaping window. The jet did not reach the top of the chimney-stack. Moving again, he played a little on the smouldering mass, until he could stand just inside the building. Then he made his jet creep up and up the brickwork.

There was a shout, Whitcombe leapt upon Doughty Dormer, flinging him several feet up the yard, where he landed on his face in a filthy puddle. There was a terrific crash, that stunned and deafened him, and for some seconds, besides hearing nothing, he could see nothing for smoke, sparks, brick-dust and steam.

The first thing he made out was Whitcombe bawling through the din, men running and general commotion. He dragged himself to the side of the yard, and leaned against the building, trying to make out what had happened. Then, as the air slowly cleared, he found that the whole chimney-stack had fallen inwards, right

JUBILEE

upon the inspector, blocking the yard and putting out most of the burning debris in the stable. Here was Whitcombe, with police and firemen, all armed with the first tool they could grab, digging and turning over the mass of brickwork to get at the body. Here was a stretcher. Then Doughty Dormer knew no more.

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When he returned to the consciousness of mortal affairs, he was in his own bed, in his own room. His astonishment at finding himself there, for he was never a man to lie abed, and had had no illness since he was twelve years old, was overcome by a feeling of extreme weakness that made him more willing than usual to lie still. One curious thing emerged as a result of his immobility. His wife, though considered "progressive" and full of "new-fangled ideas," had never questioned his natural supremacy as head of the household. It was only the 'nineties, and too early. Now that he was laid aside, her efficiency and initiative were obvious. Doughty Dormer was centuries away from envisaging the Women's question. As he got back his voice, and some of his manner with it, he exclaimed :
" 'Pon me soul, it 's remarkable the way you manage ! "

His wife smiled. She accepted the tribute just as she accepted marriage with Doughty

OUR MR. DORMER

Dormer. She was conscious enough that she did her part. The sick-room was organised upon lines ten years ahead of current standards. She had foreseen and achieved a regimen that was generally accepted only after the scandals of the coming South African War. More : she did this while still deferring to the Victorian ideas that had governed her married life. When the invalid asked one evening, who took the keys every night, she held them up and replaced them on the corner of the mantelshelf. He grew visibly better after this. He was still Doughty Dormer, of Doughtys' Bank. The keys were his insignia.

Like many another, he found convalescence less pleasant. Once up, he realised how feeble he was, how ill he had been. Hollow-eyed and shaking, he stood on the landing confronting the portrait, and passed beneath it down one flight of stairs only, to sit in the dining-room each day. It was an unique experience for him. Never in his life had he been so idle. He began to grumble, to threaten even ; but doctor, nurse, and wife sternly forbade him to hurry. He had always left the care of his clothes and the arrangement of his meals to others, and now he was unable to find what he wanted or order the foods he would have liked. He was obliged to sit still during what was, for him, a phenomenal portion of each day, and he dropped into the unaccustomed habit of meditation. It was an

JUBILEE

unusual and thoroughly unsuitable frame of mind for the active Dormer he was, and he fell to moping. Those who tended him were not slow to point out that he had every reason for the profoundest thankfulness. He had "just missed" double pneumonia, nervous breakdown, and, above all, the violent death that had found the police inspector. With his lifelong luck he had nothing worse than pleurisy, shock, and some bruises. But the effect on the spirit was more serious. He was still Doughty Dormer of Doughtys' Bank. He received messages, kind inquiries after his health; fruit and flowers besides from the young partners—Directors they were now called. But no one came upstairs to see him. Nothing was brought up to him for his decision. Yet the business was going on. The roar of the busy market day, the clang of opening and closing of safes and iron doors, came up to him, muffled but unmistakable. He was bound to face the truth. He was not indispensable. He had always felt that he was. They were managing without him, incredibly but obviously.

A salutary lesson, but it came too late and too suddenly upon one of his habit. No one could call him proud or vain in any narrow personal sense. But he was without that saving humility that sees

All men are equal in their birth,
Heirs of the seas and skies,

OUR MR. DORMER

with no essential difference between them other than the colour of the hair, the length of the purse, and certain varying powers to do or to refrain. He honestly believed—he had every reason to—that he was one of the most important men in the town. Now he sat still, watching the smoke go up from the chimneys, hearing the carts rattle in the streets. No one seemed to know how ill he was. He told his wife so. She replied, yes, she knew.

When, months after, he was allowed to go down into the office, he could not but notice the changes that had come about. Fortunately, all that he had suffered, immobilised, upstairs, had in some degree chastened him. For though he might still be Doughty Dormer of Doughtys' Bank, Doughtys' Bank was so no longer. The amalgamation had been carried through. He was a Branch Manager of a Branch of Hoppers' Union Bank, Limited. There was to be no change, it was officially stated, in the tradition. But he soon found that this, that, and the other small matter which he was accustomed to settle out of hand and mention in a perfunctory manner to the partners for confirmation, had now to be referred to "Head Office"—an amorphous and distant entity which he had never seen, didn't want to see, and consequently didn't believe in. Yet it was stronger than he. It forced him to bow to the inevitable. The inevitable was It.

Perhaps it was a mercy that the fundamental

JUBILEE

truth was hidden from his unsubtle mind. His grandfather had lived for—even taken up arms for—the Bank ; his father had raised its tone, he himself had watched and cared for it all his life. They had all done it so well that the Bank was strong enough to do without them, to develop clean out of their scope and ken into something they had never foreseen. He did not see it now, but he felt something slowly, slowly ousting him.

Not that he gave up. He did not visualise what had happened. He supposed rather that it must be he who had changed ; that the night of terror and triumph he had passed in saving the building from burning, had wrought some change in him. Whenever he came up against the inevitable, the new state of affairs, and had to submit to it, he began to explain to every one what a time he had had, that Jubilee night. He explained it at great length, having no great power or belief in words and therefore being prodigal of them. To him it was a very personal matter. If he identified himself closely with the Bank, it was equally true that he identified the Bank with himself. It was as real to him as though he had been in danger of being burnt. It was as though he were a public institution of vital importance that had had to be saved at all costs. From this point of view he recounted the events of those momentous hours. He told it first to the Directors, then to

OUR MR. DORMER

his more immediate associates. Then to one or other of the larger customers with whom he came in contact during the first morning of his return to work. Then he noticed that a fund had been opened for the widow and children of the police inspector. This brought the whole affair vividly to his mind, and he told it all over again. Shortly after this "Head Office" made some inquiry as to the fire insurance of the premises of the "Easthampton Branch," as they called it. Once again he went over the ground, to people who now said: "Yes, yes, so you told us!" The question of raising the insurance to a higher figure was discussed. Then the municipal water authority proposed to install another hydrant at the Castle Ditches end of the Alley. Then the licence of the George Inn was transferred. Then some one began to remodel and rebuild the devastated site. This again led to the question of repainting the woodwork of the Bank House where the fire had scorched it. This in turn to the general state of repair of the premises, all of which had to be referred to London, as it was obvious that one window and half a door could not be painted to the neglect of the rest, and none of it without first asking "Head Office." On each and all of these subjects he felt obliged to tell some one how it had all happened. By the time these matters had been dealt with, even he could not fail to see that people avoided him. And the

JUBILEE

worst of it was that this threw him back upon himself. He had an instinct that by sufficient reiteration that Diamond Jubilee night would cease to be a fact and become a mere tale that is told. But debarred from this means of exorcising it, the thing shut down on him. The act of God, who had dealt so gently with him all his years, now bore him down.

Nor did current events help him. Obligated to submit to the changes in the office, he got no help from outside. Those Gold Mines in which he had invested when their prospects were so brilliant did not recover from the troubles of 1896. But he refused to sell his holdings, only to be deeply depressed, as they were, by the Boer War. The final touch was the death of that Queen in whose reign he had been born, and who seemed to him, as to so many of his generation, to be part of the scheme of things, above change or term. To him, and to many another, a fixed star had fallen.

Every Napoleon meets, sooner or later, his Waterloo. The apotheosis of Doughty Dormer should have been between 1887 and 1897; that is, after the affirmation of riches and power by Imperialism, before it became clear that all the glitter had only served to render Europe coldly envious, when not openly hostile. Had he died in that decade, he would have died happy, successful, and well off. By surviving into the new century, he only lived to become

OUR MR. DORMER

scared, ill, and poorer. The crash in South African gold was the first shock, but German rivalry and industrial unrest hung longer upon his mind. The overgrown plant of his optimism had no roots and soon wilted.

His health declined, doctors examined and prescribed. There was nothing wrong with him, except *Anno Domini*, and the accumulated wear and tear of a rather sedentary and monotonous occupation, they said. It was not within their province—perhaps not within the vision of all of them—that the remedy he required was a dose of the early 'nineties. That golden prosperity, serene and undoubted, of which he had been the local dispenser, would have set him right. He hungered, as men will, for the period of his Floreat. It was behind him. Moth and rust had corrupted his rather facile and material success in life. Time the thief had broken in and stolen his Golden Dream. He had a devoted and intelligent wife, his children were no anxiety. But his home had always been with him a secondary consideration, a matter of course. His employers were kind, his colleagues indulgent, as men may be to one who has so long held an envied position. But they could not bring back Doughtys' Bank, or the old local importance of Easthampton. The town, and the office which was the pivot of its business life, had both become part of a larger system, reacting to the events of Berlin and New

JUBILEE

York, looking to Montreal and Sydney and Cape Town for its future, not to the old cities of England. He could not grasp it. He passed, hardly noticed by the men of a new time busy with its own affairs—he, who had in his day been so new and busy.

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Doughty Dormer had had forty years of what was, for the manager of a provincial Banking House, a series of brilliant successes. No fool in the matter of quick, easy, money-getting, he was among the first to realise two vital facts : one, that the Brewery boom of the 'eighties could not last ; the other, that Easthampton was too far removed from the coalfields and great ports to retain its weaving and spinning trades—a relic of the Middle Ages, and still carried on by hand-loom in garrets. He lent all his influence to the discouragement of such commerce. On the other hand, he had rare gleams of foresight. He noted the large amount of derelict old properties, gardens, semi-public spaces and meadow-land that had lingered on untouched, in and around the slovenly, easy-going old town, and which could be bought cheap. He saw that with the steadily increasing agricultural depression and rise in the standard of living, Easthampton would always have an abundant stream of cheap, semi-skilled labour

flowing in from the surrounding villages. Adding to this the cheap river-borne transport which he taught his customers to use as a lever to keep down freights, he was justly praised as having been one of the originators of the trade in hides and fish manure for which the town is now notorious. It can only be hoped that some day he will be forgiven.

Doughty Dormer was a townsman. He did not aspire to practise country sports or ape County manners. He was a member of the collar-wearing classes, with a private income, who yet worked from 9.30 to 5. His like could not be found in any country in the world, in any other period of history. Extremely civilised so far as social order and care of the person was concerned, he was naive and incurious about life in general, simple compared with Frenchmen or Italians, Romans or Greeks, Jews or Orientals. His very simplicity and carelessness of self-expression rendered him and all his kind curiously invulnerable in his struggle for existence. He and his had a good start. It sufficed to keep it. What Germans, Japs or Americans were doing, he little cared. So he lived his easy life in the security of the Bank House, in an England impervious to signs and portents, luxuriated in his careless, leisurely habits, amid a world spinning faster and faster on the orbit of Destiny, a world over-ripe for change, a world where the dreams and hopes

JUBILEE

of a romantic century were fading from the bare fact of the nations' struggle to feed their ever-increasing, ever more exacting populations.

No one consulted the portrait of Our Mr. Dormer as the coffin of his grandson passed below him, so no one knows what he thought, or whether he understood that the wooden box contained the man whom he just remembered, an infant held up before his own closing eyes. But if he looked a little darker, it may have been because there was now left no one of his own flesh and blood that he knew.

PART V
“DURATION”

PART V

“ *Duration* ”

THE years passed under the stare of the portrait of Our Mr. Dormer in the stone hall of the Bank House, and the small keen eyes that the painter had so faithfully represented, if they saw, hardly even appeared to blink.

Those were easy years, untheoretical, unself-conscious. Little happened to arouse such susceptibilities as may exist in the portrait of a Mr. Dormer of the early decades of the nineteenth century.

But time flows on, with its infinitely minute, utterly implacable modification of human affairs, and the portrait was destined to see its own fate, which was Our Mr. Dormer's fate, approach ; its own life, which was Our Mr. Dormer's, fade gradually away, while hanging up there on the wall, a mute witness of the far-circling, slow-levellings justice of things.

From 1870 the thing about which he would have cared, and in which he most truly lived, went on quietly enough from one triumph to another. There is in all history nothing so leisurely and solid as the growth of English financial institutions during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Disturbed by no particular crisis, feeling no particular competition,

OUR MR. DORMER

supported by ever-increasing natural resources and by the freighting of the world's trade, they had, during those years of world peace, an opportunity for growth unrivalled in the history of mankind. But had these institutions been merely great and flourishing commercial phenomena, there would have been nothing unique about them—and unique they were, and more especially as a result of the character which Our Mr. Dormer, and his kind, had given them.

In 1820, John Doughty had gone for a tour on the Continent, taking with him some gold coin, and a letter of introduction to the French correspondents of Messrs. T. & E. Hopper. With some difficulty he succeeded, by virtue of this letter, in obtaining such money as he needed from time to time, for his expenses.

In 1869 Doughty Dormer, going for a tour—a honeymoon tour with his young wife—took Bank of England notes and a letter of credit on certain bankers. He was treated everywhere with great civility, welcomed rather, and obtained what he required with ease.

In 1894 Doughty Dormer's elder daughter, a music teacher in the High School for Young Ladies, kept by the Misses Snow, that fronted the wall of the Cathedral Close at the lower end of Bishopgate, went for a six weeks' summer holiday through Belgium, the Rhine, Switzerland, Italy and France, and took some banknotes and her cheque-book. She had to use the notes

“DURATION”

only once. Everywhere the hotels were only too glad to take her cheques.

Such was a result of a century of Doughtys and Dormers ! It was not that the English were liked. It was not that they were sought or admired. But their word was trusted. When they wrote on a piece of stamped paper “Pay to the order of Mr. ——” so many “pounds,” they meant it. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the money was forthcoming. And what more wonderful, what more typical of Our Mr. Dormer and the thing he had made ? Perhaps the only really remarkable and lasting thing of the English civilisation ? For of what else can it boast—the printing press, gun-powder, tea . . . China had them thousands of years ago . . . steam, the screw, the plane, military and civil administration—what have we to compare with Rome ? Poetry and philosophy, art and science—where do we stand beside Athens and the Isles ? But neither Confucius, nor even the great Trajan, nor Plato, could conjure up his daily necessities by virtue of a promise, written on a piece of paper.

So it grew and blossomed, that tree of Mr. Dormer’s planting, the English Credit System, founded on Integrity—on a workaday belief in the genuine character of a promise. Aladdin’s lamp is a clumsy key for cupidity, promises of life in heaven, of heaven on earth, mere idle

OUR MR. DORMER

talk, beside that great power of belief that lies behind the cheque-book.

So nothing happened before the portrait of Our Mr. Dormer to bring the flicker of a consciousness of mortal things, for half a century. A few unemployed in the streets, a Colonial war thousands of miles away, could not break a slumber that was lulled by the ever-increasing roar of the busy cattle market on Castle Ditches, the steady vibration of the growing factory district north of the river. Sometimes those who knew and loved the old portrait in the stone hall of the Bank House thought it seemed more alive for a moment—blinked, as it were, and closed its eyes again, but there was no real awakening.

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Then suddenly, with a suddenness unknown in England for a hundred years, something did happen—something that may well have made a portrait of Our Mr. Dormer stare. Changed was the stone hall of the Bank House, dark because high buildings had been built opposite, dusty and reverberating with the ceaseless traffic that now roared down what had been Middens Alley—almost a country lane. Changed was the voice that cried new strange words in the street, a voice of a newsboy, last of all old English street cries, of which many a one had been familiar to Mr. Dormer's ears. The

“DURATION”

raucous little ghoul, whose living was earned by crying murder and scandal, hard-bitten and unimpressionable as he might be, seemed conscious that this time he had got something to go raucous about.

This time something had happened to make genuine that alarm with which he had garnished his wares.

The spirit of Fear was abroad—the terror felt when an only child suffers from an illness or accident—was out and about, across Europe, as much as across England. There was Fear of all sorts and kinds—women’s fear of what might happen to husband, father or child, rich men’s fear for their great possessions, poor men’s for their small ones. To Our Mr. Dormer, Fear took a very natural form ; to the careful, narrow mind of a Dormer, a provincial bank clerk in an English county town, it took the form of a dread lest he should be unequal to the occasion—a fear like that of his infrequent nightmares, of dreaming that he had gone to bed without locking the safe. Now he felt that, in some inadvertent manner, he had left the safety of Europe unlocked, and must see to it at once ! Easier, perhaps, said than done.

Fluttering, palpitating, darting from point to point of their uncertain contact with material, how do the disembodied move ? Catching here at some small recognisable detail, unchanged since their tenure of an earthly existence—

OUR MR. DORMER

baffled there, by something it cannot grasp, some phase of daily life so changed in its appearance as to be no longer comprehensible.

In some such gradual manner can the realisation of the state of affairs come to a Mr. Dormer, petrified in a portrait. And the effect on him was other than the effect on any living and breathing Englishman. For Mr. Dormer, unlike any one for a hundred years, was not startled, still less frightened, by European war. He could remember the name of Napoleon, hanging like a black hawk over men's minds. And he could not remember, as a more recent generation did, the awful prophecies that had been made of such an event. Wholesale destruction, panic, bankruptcy, people had said, years after he was in the grave. He would have known better. All the seventeen-nineties, all the eighteen-hundreds up to Waterloo, there had been scarcity and sacrifice, there had been American wars, Indian wars, and a great army waiting at Boulogne to invade England. And Doughtys' Bank had survived it all. No later war was likely to upset it. Like all men who have had a shock, Mr. Dormer could not be shocked a second time. The freshness of the emotion was gone. So he sat tight, frowning slightly in his portrait. And below him, instead of paralysis and despair, the Bank grew busier and busier every day, and for months it actually seemed that War was better business than Peace. As if fortified in that big,

“DURATION”

safe, comfortable old house in which his tradition had been born, Mr. Dormer let them shout and march and carry on in the street. It should not call him down from his gilt frame, he seemed to say ! Or was it merely that the precautions to screen all lighting made his varnished surface seem more sombre ?

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World wars once started are hard to stop. A curious hush seemed to fall on Easthampton. “Business as usual” was its motto, and many a factory was actually busier in consequence. But the young men were gone from the streets, and the pleasant newness from the censored papers. The country was in a state of war. Nothing he or any one else could do could now undo what was done—the gradual culmination of the history of a century, in which Doughtys’ Bank had played its part, and was in the long run, implicated.

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Thus sat Our Mr. Dormer, left alone, a mere effigy of a bygone state of things, imprisoned in a portrait in the gilt frame in the stone hall. Could he free himself from the habitat of a century and a half, and push out, intangible, a waif, a mere hovering spirit ? Doughtys’

OUR MR. DORMER

Bank had been his life, a material institution firmly fixed in England. Yet of all the strange words that swam up into his ken in those strenuous days—words about conscription and rationing, things un-English and un-Dormer—there was one he could have understood. People talked of Duration. He knew what that meant. To stare Life out of countenance, sitting square, immovable before it, what he had always done, that was it.

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Something came before those old eyes as a compensation for the dull ache of apprehension—a strange vision, the like of which had not gladdened that old face since the June morning when Stephen brought Pleasance to him. It was, at first, a patch of bright colour, a faint whiff of scent, soft footsteps, voices that struck some long-forgotten, seldom-used chord in that dusty place of business. The eyes became expressive, seemed to grasp it after this fashion : Women ! Young women ! Young women in the Bank ! Young women in the Bank putting on their clothes in what had been Mrs. Benders' pantry ! Such a refurbishing of old corners, such light and laughter in old little-used passages and doorways, for however the men might grumble, the women seemed strung up, absolutely enlivened by the war. Also, implicit

“DURATION”

in their very womanhood, the assumption of fertility, of fresh human material, replacing waste and loss. Our Mr. Dormer, from lack of commerce with the sex, remained for a long while staring as he had never stared before. But what was this?—unmistakable, unavoidable, one of the young women was standing right beneath him, staring him in the face. He stared back, dark-eyed behind his Madeira-coloured varnish, into grey eyes, well set under even brows, high cheek-bones and a good deal of chin, rose-white with health and careful attention, and dull brown—not mouse-coloured—hair, no, surely no! yes, cropped close like a boy's, and fluffing out in an aureole under a white woolly cap.

Who can say whether something stirred in Mr. Dormer? His courtship of Susan Alden had hardly been on lines to indicate the conduct appropriate to such an occasion. So he simply stared—undistinguished but inevitable. What was this? The young woman, aided by another with much laughter and mock remonstrance, had fetched the small ladder he had had made to reach the high shelves in the Record Room, and was climbing up. Mr. Dormer may have had time to think how fashions repeat themselves, how the low neck and short skirt just coming in were almost identical with the same fashion that had just gone out in his time, when he felt her hand on his frame—what was it—

holly and mistletoe? She addressed him : "That's for your Christmas." The other young woman, down below, was making suggestions, but Mr. Dormer's young woman demurred. She even whispered to him :

"I can't spare a single one—he's coming on leave!" So that Mr. Dormer's eyes grew mystified, flat paint and canvas again, until a week or so later a young man called for her at the Bank, stood below Mr. Dormer, fidgiting with his cane, and shifting his weight from one heavy boot to the other, a poor, polished-up, private soldier, in Mr. Dormer's eyes—just a nobody. But when She came, and after a half-shy greeting, took His arm, there was such a glow in her upturned face, with its look of giving up her whole self, and at the same time taking, irrevocably, even Mr. Dormer's portrait caught some faint inkling of what is meant by "the depth of love." Excusable in war-time, of course.

Time passes. The old portrait, accustomed to wars that lasted on, year in and year out, did not blink at the fact that this one should go on, but stared at the unheard-of way in which it engrossed people. Either people were changing or it was a new sort of war. Mr. Dormer's expression scouted both propositions. Change was suspect to him.

The young woman again intruded on his age-long sleep. Alone, in the middle of what he

“ D U R A T I O N ”

would have perceived, by the atmosphere of bustle, to be a busy morning, she came out irresolutely, wandered across the hall, stood as if to take down her fur coat, then buried her face in it. Surely even Mr. Dormer must be strangely affected, if he could hear the sobs that seemed as if they would break her very bones. Then she straightened up, pulled out a little mirror and pad, dabbed her eyes and cheeks, swept the curly ends of hair aside. Some one was shown into the hall to see her, a hard-faced woman, blank, revengeful, who began : “ I don’t know why I show you—we had heard nothing about you ; however, here it is ! ” A message, what they called a “ telegram ” : “ Missing believed killed ! ” were the words that reached Mr. Dormer. The young woman was as hard as the other, frigid, formal. She showed her visitor out, said it was of no consequence—kind of her to call ! and then flopped straight down on the mat as if she had been shot. People ran, picked her up, sent her off in a cab.

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Not that such an incident interrupted business. Mr. Dormer approved of the way they went on. They were very busy. The boom of 1920 was looming in the distance. The old office, clumsily enlarged and still containing much of the original one in which he had worked,

hummed like an apiary and smelled like a flower-bed. There were twice as many girls as men, and the general system of the place, unaltered as it had been since 1860, was bursting at all points with the pressure.

This became apparent when a sort of slackening somewhere informed Mr. Dormer that fighting had ceased. It then became evident that there was no going back to Peace. The world had gone forward, to Peace, it was true, but what a Peace. The changes of wartime had been greater than those of the previous quarter-century, the change of 1919-20 was even greater than those of the war. The ultra-conservative old institution, once it had begun to alter, could not stop, apparently. The frenzy of amalgamation and absorption was at its height. Hoppers' now had a capital of ten millions, fifteen hundred offices, ten thousand clerks.

Owing to Government borrowing, the investing public had more than doubled. A busy new special department dealt with stocks and bonds, coupons and dividend warrants. Owing to Government disbursements, another department had to be invented to deal with the pensions and gratuities, grants and imprests that abounded. Yet another dealt with loans and overdrafts on which the business of the trade "boom" was being done. Yet others endeavoured to cope with the terrific problem of post-war income tax. Yet another with the foreign

“DURATION”

exchanges, which the English banks, who had always despised such paltry affairs and turned them over to foreign banks, now that those foreign banks were forcibly liquidated, found themselves obliged to conduct for themselves.

All these varying activities demanded special skill and knowledge which Mr. Dormer had never acquired. He would have looked in vain for the old simple bookkeeping that he had known. But here an even greater change awaited him. It had been discovered that a girl of seventeen armed with a Burroughes machine was twice as quick, twice as legible, and infinitely nearer being infallible than the best bookkeeper that ever lived.

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From being an uncommon thing, it had become a common one to see directors, inspectors and others in close consultation. But now there was something definitely on foot. Curious men were mingled with the bank officials, men with hairy heads, in Norfolk jackets, architects and quantity surveyors. At length the truth was known, the Bank was to be rebuilt.

There is still something important about the rebuilding of a bank in a provincial town. The oldest of our commercial institutions owes so much to sentiment and habit, has been so long the visible symbol of integrity, standing in its

accustomed place with well-known features. Dating from before the post offices, the railways, and factories, the theatres and museums of a modern town, the banks of England are the only considerable group of public buildings we have produced since we left off building cathedrals and castles. And above all, in the provincial town, the old square unpretentious building in the main street became better and better known and understood. Far below the social level of those who used it, the factory hands and smaller tradespeople had come, with the spread of education, to know it as the ultimate source of their earnings, as the archetype of funded solidity, with which their own solvency was intimately bound up. Against its placid bulk social reformers fulminated in vain. The general opinion of the voter was "Interfere with the bank? Where 'd we be then?" Its rebuilding, therefore, its reaffirmation, in stronger terms, made a vague but deep impression on the public mind.

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Slowly and with difficulty did the fact penetrate to Mr. Dormer. First there was the difficulty that any mere portrait, with its shortened senses, must experience in perceiving anything. Then there was the gradual hardening of the paint and canvas into a mere effigy, farther

“DURATION”

and farther from life. But what really informed him was the moving out of the furniture. So that it was a queerly haunted house that he inhabited, up the broad stairs—a house from which the Doughtys had departed, leaving it empty for their ghosts ; for what else were the racks and shelves of carefully labelled and dated books and registers that lined what had been the dining-room and drawing-room ? while on the second floor lived a whole caretaker's family—the boys of which played cricket on the great landing at the top of the stairs below the plaster eagle. Mr. Dormer had to admit the fact that the old place was scarcely habitable. Motor traffic in the street shook it through and through, trams outside made its long passages and high rooms vibrate. Electric light switches gleamed queerly on its panelled walls.

In 1763 the father of Joseph and John Doughty had thrown the front of the entrance hall, and the two living rooms each side of it, into the “Banking Office.” This had served with minor alterations until 1870, when, under Doughty Dormer, the partners in the new firm had taken in the little sitting-room where Mr. Dormer had first seen Pleasance, and the kitchens where Mrs. Benders had functioned, and had built on part of the garden. In 1900, after the amalgamation with Hoppers', over the remainder of the garden, between Middens Alley and Riverside, and right back to Castle

OUR MR. DORMER

Ditches, the tide of building had rolled, covering the site of the little lodge in which Stephen Dormer had been born. But this had only kept pace with the requirement up to the war. Now the whole thing had to be rehoused, remodelled.

From the windows of the bedroom from which Our Mr. Dormer had gazed away over half an acre of garden to the trees on Castle Ditches, the view now consisted in the brick walls of new offices and additions, a few yards away. Before the windows of the drawing-room, from which Pleasance had bowed to whiskered officers, riding away to the Crimea or the Mutiny, before the fan-window of the bedroom from which Stephen Dormer had gazed towards Eastwick where the girl he loved so romantically was gazing westward towards him, there now stretched a network of wires, tram, telegraph, telephone, barring any clear vision of the sky. The well of the house was dark and obscure, because the surrounding buildings had, one by one, been heightened or increased. But there was more than that. The Quaker who had built it had been a thoughtful, cultured man. Mr. Dormer neither read nor thought, but he respected the results of those exercises, which he called Gentility. It had ministered greatly to his pride when his son had married into the Gentry, and added Gentility. And now he could feel that the old place had lost Gentility.

“DURATION”

And when a house has lost its character—its reason for being built—what can be done with it but pull it down ?

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The only people in the post-war England who seemed to stand definitely better off—freer, happier, more developed—were the women employed in doing what had been men's jobs. There was something more in it than the sufficiently important facts that they had devised fashions of dress that, if not beautiful, were healthier, less cumbersome and expensive than ever before, or that they were politically and economically independent as women have never been, except in the fables about Amazons. Perhaps it was that the emotional strain of war suited them, that they were at their best amid its sacrifices and dangers, but certain it is that they glowed with exaltation, and, even in the mean post-war cry of “no women in men's jobs,” kept their equanimity. Among all the women that so shone, there was none brighter, in Mr. Dormer's eyes, than that girl of grey eyes and short brown hair who had decorated his frame that first Christmas. With admirable foresight, it now seemed to him, she had been christened Sidney. Men and she had much in common. The work made friendships if not matches. She who might have thought bank-

OUR MR. DORMER

clerking rather an insipid game, he who might have found a cigarette-smoking, slang-speaking girl clerk rather a disturbing innovation to his neat middle-class ideas—were able to respect each other. When she passed below him, she would look up and smile, and he would glow back at her. Then, one day, he heard her called “Miss Dormer,” and remained stupefied. Doughty Dormer was the last Dormer, that, as a tiny infant, had been held before his eyes. Was this one of his own flesh and blood come to work out, in this distant fashion, the Dormer tradition?

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The moving to new premises of any big business which cannot be closed down even temporarily is a momentous matter. In the case of the Old Bank, as it had long been called, it was even more difficult, because the existing buildings had to be demolished, rebuilt, and used, all at the same time. The plan eventually followed was one by which the newer offices next Castle Ditches were gutted first, and rearranged to receive the desks, books, smaller safes and necessary impedimenta. Then the old house could be emptied into the space so provided and demolished, and the new buildings begun upon its site. These, in turn, would re-absorb the furniture and necessities of the daily routine,

“DURATION”

while the portion next Castle Ditches was rebuilt.

Like all such plans, its performance was only approximate. The gangs engaged in preparing the buildings next Castle Ditches were prevented by unforeseeable obstacles from preparing for the temporary use of that portion of the property. On the other hand, the actual moving had to take place on August Bank Holiday, this being the only moment between Whitsun and Christmas during which the doors were closed for forty-eight hours. Consequently the end of July was a time of feverish bustle, noise and dust. The preparations were only completed on the Saturday before the holiday, and everything was ready.

But however delayed and postponed, the day came at last. Some one took the old portrait down from the place in which it had hung for nearly eighty years, and wrapped it up. And with the muffling of its visual organs surely something passed from the spiritual life of Our Mr. Dormer. For a portrait is something which appeals only to the eye. It is what someone has looked like. And its only life is in its eyes. See how they follow you about, looking at you, or just beyond you, as the portrait may have been painted, full face, or three-quarter. But of other senses it has none. Just as the sunshine and sweetness of a generation ago may steal back to our palate with an old wine, though

OUR MR. DORMER

we cannot see them, so Mr. Dormer could be seen, and perhaps see. But once covered, his use and reason were gone.

When he was uncovered again, there can be no doubt that up there, in his portrait, he felt his end approaching—felt that he was passing out of Life into History, with far more actuality than he had ever felt the physical approach of Death of the Body. Those who cared for the old portrait, for the old man it portrayed, for his generation and all his works, noticed that in spite of careful hanging and excellent lighting, it never looked the same in its new environment. And some said that it was because the portrait was a mediocre painting, painted by a deservedly obscure artist, who wanted to earn ten guineas, and that, once it was removed from the place where it had always hung, amid the scenes that suited it, and in an inferior light that assisted it, its numerous faults overcame its few virtues. But others thought, if they did not say, that perhaps there was more in it than that. Perhaps the old man, who had cared for and feared for the Bank, had never contemplated that one day the business that had been so largely the work of his hands would be so huge, so safe, so important that it would have outgrown, discarded and forgotten him.

All that is certain is, that if he did any longer grasp what had happened to him, he must have been astonished indeed. For the place to which

“DURATION”

he had been taken was a public place, no other than a Museum, of all, to him, unimaginable situations. But so surely as he built and fostered commercial property, just so surely had the inevitable results followed. Highly civilised and developed, the inhabitants of what had been the remote market town of Easthampton were now highly self-conscious, intent, among other things, upon Education. The height of education was shown in their Museum, which far from being a mere repository of dead birds and stones, had blossomed out into a series of “specimens of domestic interiors” for the instruction of the young and the edification of the old. They were thus shown “typical Tudor room,” “Jacobean room” and “Georgian room,” and, last of all, “typical counting-house, Industrial-Commercial Era.” There, above old desks and counters, quills and parchments, hung Our Mr. Dormer, presiding genius of the place, looking flat and owl-eyed, as never before. And the interested spectators would turn and say to each other : “Good gracious, were they really like that ?” And in that crowd were actually people of the name of Dormer, descendants of Doughty Dormer, born long after Our Mr. Dormer’s death. And they were most astonished of all, saying to each other : “Well, I never ; that must be our Great-grandfather !” or “Great-uncle !” as the case might be, and then smiling a little, incredulous, and slightly superior. And

OUR MR. DORMER

there Our Mr. Dormer remained, embalmed in those very scenes he had created, superseded, as all human creatures must be, by their own virtues, overcome by the superhuman—the effort of themselves to be something more than mere transitory human beings. In the case of Our Mr. Dormer, at least, the success was complete.

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